registered. At the same time, each successive call mostly canceled the others out.

This paralysis led the three advisers to rely on the other particularly effective way to move him, which was to use the media. Hence each man became an inveterate and polished leaker. Bannon and Kushner studiously avoided press exposure; two of the most powerful people in government were, for the most part, entirely silent, eschewing almost all interviews and even the traditional political conversations on Sunday morning television. Curiously, however, both men became the background voices to virtually all media coverage of the White House. Early on, before getting down to attacking each other, Bannon and Kushner were united in their separate offensives against Priebus. Kushner's preferred outlet was Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski's *Morning Joe*, one of the president's certain morning shows. Bannon's first port of call was the alt-right media ("Bannon's Breitbart shenanigans," in Walsh's view). By the end of the first month in the White House, Bannon and Kushner had each built a network of primary outlets, as well as secondary ones to deflect from the obviousness of the primary ones, creating a White House that simultaneously displayed extreme animosity toward the press and yet great willingness to leak to it. In this, at least, Trump's administration was achieving a landmark transparency.

The constant leaking was often blamed on lower minions and permanent executive branch staff, culminating in late February with an all-hands meeting of staffers called by Sean Spicer—cell phones surrendered at the door—during which the press secretary issued threats of random phone checks and admonitions about the use of encrypted texting apps. Everybody was a potential leaker; everybody was accusing everybody else of being a leaker.

Everybody *was* a leaker.

One day, when Kushner accused Walsh of leaking about him, she challenged him back: "My phone records versus yours, my email versus yours."

But most of the leaks, certainly the juiciest ones, were coming from the higher-ups—not to mention from the person occupying the topmost echelon.

The president couldn't stop talking. He was plaintive and self-pitying, and it was obvious to everyone that if he had a north star, it was just to be liked. He was ever uncomprehending about why everyone did not like him, or why it should be so difficult to get everyone to like him. He might be happy throughout the day as a parade of union steel workers or CEOs trooped into the White House, with the president praising his visitors and them praising him, but that good cheer would sour in the evening after several hours of cable television. Then he would get on the phone, and in unguarded ramblings to friends and others, conversations that would routinely last for thirty or forty minutes, and could go much longer, he would vent, largely at the media and his staff. In what was termed by some of the self-appointed Trump experts around him—and everyone was a

Trump expert—he seemed intent on "poisoning the well," in which he created a loop of suspicion, disgruntlement, and blame heaped on others.

When the president got on the phone after dinner, it was often a rambling affair. In paranoid or sadistic fashion, he'd speculate on the flaws and weaknesses of each member of his staff. Bannon was disloyal (not to mention he always looks like shit). Priebus was weak (not to mention he was short—a midget). Kushner was a suck-up. Spicer was stupid (and looks terrible too). Conway was a crybaby. Jared and Ivanka should never have come to Washington.

His callers, largely because they found his conversation peculiar, alarming, or completely contrary to reason and common sense, often overrode what they might otherwise have assumed to be the confidential nature of the calls and shared the content with someone else. Hence news about the inner workings of the White House went into free circulation. Except it was not so much the inner workings of the White House—although it would often be reported as such—but the perambulations of the president's mind, which changed direction almost as fast as he could express himself. Yet there were constant tropes in his own narrative: Bannon was about to be cast out, Priebus too, and Kushner needed his protection from the other bullies.

So if Bannon, Priebus, and Kushner were now fighting a daily war with one another, it was mightily exacerbated by something of a running disinformation campaign about them that was being prosecuted by the president himself. A chronic naysayer, he viewed each member of his inner circle as a problem child whose fate he held in his hand. "We are sinners and he is God" was one view; "We serve at the president's displeasure," another.

* * *

In the West Wing of every administration since at least that of Clinton and Gore, the vice president has occupied a certain independent power base in the organization. And yet Vice President Mike Pence—the fallback guy in an administration the length of whose term remained the subject of something like a national office betting pool—was a cipher, a smiling presence either resisting his own obvious power or unable to seize it.

"I do funerals and ribbon cuttings," he told a former Republican Hill colleague. In this, he was seen as either feigning an old-fashioned, what-me-worry, standard-issue veep identity lest he upset his patron or, in fact, honestly acknowledging who he was.

Katie Walsh, amid the chaos, saw the vice president's office as a point of calm in the storm. Pence's staff was not only known by people outside the White House for the alacrity with which it returned calls and for the ease with which it seemed to accomplish West Wing tasks, it also seemed to be comprised of people who liked each other and who were dedicated to a common goal: eliminating as much friction as possible around the vice president.

Pence started nearly every speech saying, "I bring greetings from our forty-fifth president of the United States, Donald J. Trump …"—a salutation directed more to the president than to the audience.

Pence cast himself as blandly uninteresting, sometimes barely seeming to exist in the shadow of Donald Trump. Little leaked out of the Pence side of the White House. The people who worked for the vice president, were, like Pence himself, people of few words.

In a sense, he had solved the riddle of how to serve as the junior partner to a president who could not tolerate any kind of comparisons: extreme self-effacement.

"Pence," said Walsh, "is not dumb."

Actually, well short of intelligent was exactly how others in the West Wing saw him. And because he wasn't smart, he was not able to provide any leadership ballast.

On the Jarvanka side, Pence became a point of grateful amusement. He was almost absurdly happy to be Donald Trump's vice president, happy to play the role of exactly the kind of vice president that would not ruffle Trump's feathers. The Jarvanka side credited Pence's wife, Karen, as the guiding hand behind his convenient meekness. Indeed, he took to this role so well that, later, his extreme submissiveness struck some as suspicious.

The Priebus side, where Walsh firmly sat, saw Pence as one of the few senior West Wing figures who treated Priebus as though he was truly the chief of staff. Pence often seemed like a mere staffer, the ever present note taker in so many meetings.

From the Bannon side, Pence garnered only contempt. "Pence is like the husband in *Ozzie and Harriet*, a nonevent," said one Bannonite.

Although many saw him as a vice president who might well assume the presidency someday, he was also perceived as the weakest vice president in decades and, in organizational terms, an empty suit who was useless in the daily effort to help restrain the president and stabilize the West Wing.

* * *

During that first month, Walsh's disbelief and even fear about what was happening in the White House moved her to think about quitting. Every day after that became its own countdown toward the moment she knew she wouldn't be able to take it anymore—which would finally come at the end of March. To Walsh, the proud political pro, the chaos, the rivalries, and the president's own lack of focus and lack of concern were simply incomprehensible.

In early March, Walsh confronted Kushner and demanded: "Just give me the three things the president wants to focus on. What are the three priorities of this White House?"

"Yes," said Kushner, wholly absent an answer, "we should probably have that conversation."

9

CPAC

On February 23, a 75-degree day in Washington, the president woke up complaining about an overheated White House. But for once, the president's complaints were not the main concern. The excited focus in the West Wing was organizing a series of car pools out to the Conservative Political Action Conference, the annual gathering of conservative movement activists, which had outgrown the accommodations of Washington hotels and moved to the Gaylord Resort on Maryland's National Harbor waterfront. CPAC, right of right-of-center and trying to hold steady there, ambivalent about all the conservative vectors that further diverged from that point, had long had an uncomfortable relationship with Trump, viewing him as an unlikely conservative, if not a charlatan. CPAC, too, saw Bannon and Breitbart as practicing an outré conservatism. For several years Breitbart had staged a nearby competitive conference dubbed "The Uninvited."

But the Trump White House would dominate or even subsume the conference this year, and everybody wanted to turn out for this sweet moment. The president, set to speak on the second day, would, like Ronald Reagan, address the conference in his first year in office, whereas both Bushes, wary of CPAC and conservative activists, had largely snubbed the gathering.

Kellyanne Conway, a conference opener, was accompanied by her assistant, two daughters, and a babysitter. Bannon was making his first official pubic appearance of the Trump presidency, and his retinue included Rebekah Mercer, the pivotal Trump donor and Breitbart funder, her young daughter, and Allie Hanley, a Palm Beach aristocrat, conservative donor, and Mercer friend. (The imperious Hanley, who had not met Bannon before, pronounced him "dirty" looking.)

Bannon was scheduled to be interviewed in the afternoon session by CPAC chairman Matt Schlapp, a figure of strained affability who seemed to be trying to embrace the Trump takeover of his conference. A few days before, Bannon had decided to add Priebus to the interview, as both a private gesture of goodwill and a public display of unity—a sign of a budding alliance against Kushner.

In nearby Alexandria, Virginia, Richard Spencer, the president of the National Policy Institute, which is sometimes described as a "white supremacist think tank," who had, peskily for the White House, adopted the Trump presidency as a personal victory, was organizing his trip to CPAC, which would be as much a victory march for him as it was for the Trump team. Spencer—who, in 2016, he had declared, "Let's party like it's 1933," as in the year Hitler came to power—provoked an outcry with his widely covered "Heil Trump" (or "Hail Trump," which of course amounts to the same thing) salute after the election, and then achieved a kind of reverse martyrdom by taking a punch from a protester on Inauguration Day that was memorialized on YouTube.

CPAC, organized by the remnants of the conservative movement after Barry Goldwater's apocalyptic defeat in 1964, had, with stoic indefatigability, turned itself into the backbone of conservative survival and triumph. It had purged John Birchers and the racist right and embraced the philosophic conservative tenets of Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley. In time, it endorsed Reagan-era small government and antiregulatory reform, and then added the components of the cultural wars—antiabortion, anti-gay-marriage, and a tilt toward evangelicals—and married itself to conservative media, first right-wing radio and later Fox News. From this agglomeration it spun an ever more elaborate and all-embracing argument of conservative purity, synchronicity, and intellectual weight. Part of the fun of a CPAC conference, which attracted a wide assortment of conservative young people (reliably mocked as the Alex P. Keaton crowd by the growing throng of liberal press that covered the conference), was the learning of the conservative catechism.

But after a great Clinton surge in the 1990s, CPAC started to splinter during the George W. Bush years. Fox News became the emotional center of American conservativism. Bush neocons and the Iraq War were increasingly rejected by the libertarians and other suddenly breakaway factions (among them the paleocons); the family values right, meanwhile, was more and more challenged by younger conservatives. In the Obama years, the conservative movement was increasingly bewildered by Tea Party rejectionism and a new iconoclastic right-wing media, exemplified by Breitbart News, which was pointedly excluded from the CPAC conference.

In 2011, professing conservative fealty, Trump lobbied the group for a speaking slot and, with reports of a substantial cash contribution, was awarded a fifteen-minute berth. If CPAC was supposedly about honing a certain sort of conservative party line, it was also attentive to a wide variety of conservative celebrities, including, over the years, Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, and various Fox News stars. The year before Obama's reelection, Trump fell into this category. But he was viewed quite differently four years later. In the winter of 2016, during the still competitive Republican primary race, Trump—now eyed as much as a Republican apostate as a Republican crowd pleaser—decided to forgo CPAC and what he feared would be less than a joyous welcome.

This year, as part of its new alignment with the Trump-Bannon White House, CPAC's personality headliner was slated to be the alt-right figure Milo Yiannopoulos, a gay British right-wing provocateur attached to Breitbart News. Yiannopoulos—whose entire position, rather more like a circa-1968 left-wing provocateur, seemed to be about flouting political correctness and social convention, resulting in left-wing hysteria and protests against him—was as confounding a conservative figure as could be imagined. Indeed, there was a subtle suggestion that CPAC had chosen Yiannopoulos precisely to hoist Bannon and the White House on the implicit connection to him—Yiannopoulos had been something of a Bannon protégé. When, two days before CPAC opened, a conservative blogger discovered a video of Yiannopoulos in bizarre revelry seeming to rationalize pedophilia, the White House made it clear he had to go.

Still, the White House presence at CPAC—which included, along with the president, Bannon, Conway, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, and the oddball White House foreign policy adviser and former Breitbart writer Sebastian Gorka—seemed to push the Yiannopoulos mess to the side. If CPAC was always looking to leaven boring politicians with star power, Trump, and anyone connected him, were now the biggest stars. With her family positioned out in front of a full house, Conway was interviewed in Oprah-like style by Mercedes Schlapp (wife of Matt Schlapp—CPAC was a family affair), a columnist for the conservative *Washington Times* who would later join the White House communications staff. It was an intimate and inspirational view of a woman of high achievement, the kind of interview that Conway believed she would have been treated to on network and cable television if she were not a Trump Republican—the type of treatment, she'd point out, that had been given to Democratic predecessors like Valerie Jarrett.

At about the time that Conway was explaining her particular brand of antifeminist feminism, Richard Spencer arrived at the convention center hoping to attend the breakout session "The Alt-Right Ain't Right at All," a modest effort to reaffirm CPAC's traditional values. Spencer, who since the Trump victory had committed himself to full-time activism and press opportunities, had planned to position himself to get in the first question. But almost immediately upon arriving and paying his $150 registration fee, he had attracted first one reporter and then a growing circle, a spontaneous press scrum, and he responded by giving an ad hoc news conference. Like Yiannopoulos, and in many ways like Trump and Bannon, Spencer helped frame the ironies of the modern conservative movement. He was a racist but hardly a conservative—he doggedly supported single-payer health care, for instance. And the attention he received was somehow less a credit to conservatism than another effort by the liberal media to smear conservatism. Hence, as the scrum around him increased to as many as thirty people, the CPAC irony police stepped in.

"You're not welcome on the property," announced one of the security guards. "They want you off the property. They want you to cease. They want you off the property."

"Wow," said Spencer. "Can they?"

"Enough debate," the guard said. "This is private property and CPAC wants you off the property."

Relieved of his credentials, Spencer was ushered to the CPAC perimeter of the hotel, where, his pride not all that wounded, he turned, in the comfort of the atrium lounge area, to social media and to texting and emailing reporters on his contact list.

The point Spencer was making was that his presence here was not really so disruptive or ironic as Bannon's, or, for that matter, Trump's. He might be ejected, but in a larger historical sense it was the conservatives who were now being ejected from their own movement by the new cadre—which included Trump and Bannon—of what Spencer called the identitarians, proponents of "white interests, values, customs, and culture."

Spencer was, he believed, the true Trumper and the rest of CPAC now the outliers.

* * *

In the green room, after Bannon, Priebus, and their retinues had arrived, Bannon—in dark shirt, dark jacket, and white pants—stood off to the side talking to his aide, Alexandra Preate. Priebus sat in the makeup chair, patiently receiving a layer of foundation, powder, and lip gloss.

"Steve—" said Priebus, gesturing to the chair as he got up.

"That's okay," said Bannon. He put up his hand, making another of the continual small gestures meant, pointedly, to define himself as something other than every phony baloney in swampland politics—and something other than Reince Priebus, with his heavy powder foundation.

The significance of Bannon's first appearance in public—after days of apparent West Wing turmoil, a *Time* magazine cover story about him, nearly endless speculation about his power and true intentions, and his elevation at least in the media mind to the essential mystery of the Trump White House—could hardly be underestimated. For Bannon himself this was, in his own mind, a carefully choreographed moment. It was his victory walk. He had, he thought, prevailed in the West Wing. He had, again in his own mind, projected his superiority over both Priebus and the idiot son-in-law. And he would now dominate CPAC. But for the moment he attempted a shucks-nothing-to-it lack of self-consciousness even as, at the same time, he was unquestionably the preening man of the hour. Demurring about accepting makeup was not just a way to belittle Priebus, but also a way to say that, ever the commando, he went into battle fully exposed.

"You know what he thinks even when you don't know what he thinks," explained Alexandra Preate. "He's a bit like a good boy who everybody knows is a bad boy."

When the two men emerged onto the stage and appeared on the big-screen monitors, the contrast between them could hardly have been greater. The powder made Priebus look mannequin-like, and his suit with lapel pin, little-boyish. Bannon, the supposedly publicity-shy man, was eating up the camera. He was a country music star—he was Johnny Cash. He seized Priebus's hand in a power handshake, then relaxed in his chair as Priebus came too eagerly forward in his.

Priebus opened with traditional bromides. Bannon, taking his turn, went wryly for the dig: "I want to thank you for finally inviting me to CPAC."

"We decided to say that everybody is a part of our conservative family," said Matt Schlapp, resigned. He then welcomed "the back of the room," where the hundreds of reporters covering the event were positioned.

"Is that the opposition party?" asked Bannon, shielding his eyes.

Schlapp went to the setup question: "We read a lot about you two. Ahem …"

"It's all good," replied Priebus tightly.

"I'll bet not all of it's accurate," said Schlapp. "I'll bet there's things that don't get written correctly. Let me ask both of you, what's the biggest misconception about what's going on in the Donald Trump White House?"

Bannon responded with something just less than a smirk and said nothing.

Priebus offered a testimonial to the closeness of his relationship with Bannon.

Bannon, eyes dancing, lifted the microphone trumpetlike and made a joke about Priebus's commodious office—two couches and a fireplace—and his own rough-and-ready one.

Priebus hewed to the message. "It's, ahh … it's actually … something that you all have helped build, which is, when you bring together, and what this election shows, and what President Trump showed, and let's not kid ourselves, I can talk about data and ground game and Steve can talk about big ideas but the truth of the matter is Donald Trump, President Trump, brought together the party and the conservative movement, and I tell you if the party and the conservative movement are together"—Priebus knocked his fists—"similar to Steve and I, it can't be stopped. And President Trump is the one guy, he was the one person, and I can say this after overseeing sixteen people kill each other, it was Donald Trump who was able to bring this country, this party, and this movement together. And Steve and I know that and we live it every day and our job is to get the agenda of President Trump through the door and on pen and paper."

With Priebus gasping for breath, Bannon snatched the relay baton. "I think if you look at the opposition party"—throwing his hand out to the back of the room—"and how they portrayed the campaign, how they portrayed the transition, and now how they are portraying the administration, it's always wrong. I mean on the very first day that Kellyanne and I started, we reached out to Reince, Sean Spicer, Katie… . It's the same team, you know, that every day was grinding away at the campaign, the same team that did the transition, and if you remember, the campaign was the most chaotic, in the media's description, most chaotic, most disorganized, most unprofessional, had no earthly idea what they were doing, and then you saw 'em all crying and weeping that night on November 8."

Back in the White House, Jared Kushner, watching the proceedings casually and then more attentively, suddenly felt a rising anger. Thin-skinned, defensive, on guard, he perceived Bannon's speech as a message sent directly to him. Bannon has just credited the Trump victory to everybody else. Kushner was certain he was being taunted.

When Schlapp asked the two men to enumerate the accomplishments of the last thirty days, Priebus floundered and then seized on Judge Gorsuch and the deregulation executive orders, all things, said Priebus, "that"—he paused, struggling—"eighty percent of Americans agree with."

After a brief pause, as though waiting for the air to clear, Bannon raised the microphone: "I kind of break it down into three verticals, three buckets; the first, national security and sovereignty, and that's your intelligence, defense department, homeland security. The second line of work is what I refer to as economic nationalism, and that is Wilbur Ross at Commerce, Steve Mnuchin at Treasury, [Robert] Lighthizer at Trade, Peter Navarro, [and] Stephen Miller, who are rethinking how we are going to reconstruct our trade arrangements around the world. The third, broadly, line of work is deconstruction of the administrative state—" Bannon stopped for a moment; the phrase, which had never before been uttered in American politics, drew wild applause. "The way the progressive left runs is that if they can't get it passed they're just going to put it in some sort of regulation in an agency. That's all going to be deconstructed."

Schlapp fed another setup question, this one about the media.

Priebus grabbed it, rambled and fumphered for a while, and ended up, somehow, on a positive note: *We'll all come together*.

Lifting the microphone, once again Joshua-like, and with a sweeping wave of his hand, Bannon pronounced, "It's not only not going to get better, it's going to get worse every day"—his fundamental apocalyptic song—"and here's why—and by the way, the internal logic makes sense, corporatist, globalist media, that are adamantly opposed, adamantly opposed, to an economic nationalist agenda like Donald Trump has. And here's why it's going to get worse: because he's going to continue to press his agenda. And as economic conditions continue to get better, as more jobs get better, they're going to continue to fight. If you think they're going to give you your country back without a fight you are sadly mistaken. Every day it is going to be a fight. This is why I'm proudest of Donald Trump. All the opportunities he had to waver off this. All the people he had coming to him saying 'Oh, you got to moderate.' " Another dig at Kushner. "Every day in the Oval Office he tells Reince and me, 'I committed this to the American people. I promised this when I ran.

And I'm going to deliver on this.' "

And then the final, agreed-upon-beforehand question: "Can this Trump movement be combined with what's happening at CPAC and other conservative movements for fifty years? Can this be brought together … and is this going to save the country?"

"Well, we have to stick together as a team," said Priebus. "It's gonna take all of us working together to make it happen."

As Bannon started into his answer, he spoke slowly, looking out at his captive and riveted audience: "I've said that there is a new political order being formed out of this and it's still being formed. If you look at the wide degree of opinions in this room, whether you are a populist, whether you're a limited-government conservative, whether you're a libertarian, whether you're an economic nationalist, we have wide and sometimes divergent opinions, but I think the center core of what we believe, that we're a nation with an economy, not an economy just in some global market place with open borders, but that we are a nation with a culture, and a reason for being. I think that's what unites us. And that's what's going to unite this movement going forward."

Bannon lowered the microphone to, after what might be interpreted as a beat of uncertainty, suddenly thunderous applause.

Watching from the White House, Kushner—who had come to believe that there was something insidious when Bannon used the words "borders," "global," "culture," and "unite," and who was more and more convinced that they were personally directed against him—was now in a rage.

* * *

Kellyanne Conway had increasingly been worrying about the seventy-year-old president's sleeplessness and his worn look. It was the president's indefatigability—a constant restlessness—that she believed carried the team. On the campaign trail, he would always add stops and speeches. He doubled his own campaign time. Hillary worked at half time; he worked at double time. He sucked in the energy from the crowds. Now that he was living alone in the White House, though, he had seemed to lose a step.

But today he was back. He had been under the sunlamp and lightened his hair, and when the climate-change-denying president woke up on another springlike morning, 77 degrees in the middle of winter, on the second day of CPAC, he seemed practically a different person, or anyway a noticeably younger one. At the appointed hour, to the locked-down ballroom at the Gaylord Resort, filled to capacity with all stripes of the conservative faithful—Rebekah Mercer and her daughter up front—and hundreds of media people in an SRO gallery, the president emerged onto the stage, not in an energetic television-style rush, but with a slow swagger to the low strains of "I'm Proud to Be an American." He came to the stage as a political strongman, a man occupying his moment, clapping—here he reverted to entertainer pose—as he slowly approached the podium, mouthing “Thank you,” crimson tie dipping over his belt.

This would be Trump’s fifth CPAC address. As much as Steve Bannon liked to see himself as the author of Donald Trump, he also seemed to find it proof of some added legitimacy—and somehow amazing in itself—that since 2011 Trump had basically come to CPAC with the same message. He wasn’t a cipher, he was a messenger. The country was a “mess”—a word that had stood the Trump test of time. Its leaders were weak. Its greatness had been lost. The only thing different was that in 2011 he was still reading his speeches with only occasional ad-libs, and now he ad-libbed everything.

“My first major speech was at CPAC,” the president began. “Probably five or six years ago. My first major political speech. You were there. I loved it. I loved the people. I loved the commotion. They did these polls where I went through the roof. I wasn’t even running, right? But it gave me an idea! And I got a little bit concerned when I saw what was happening in the country so I said let’s go to it. It was very exciting. I walked the stage at CPAC. I had very little notes and even less preparation.” (In fact, he read his 2011 speech from a sheet of paper.) “So when you have practically no notes and no preparation and then you leave and everybody was thrilled. I said, I think I like this business.”

This first preamble gave way to the next preamble.

“I want you all to know that we are fighting the fake news. It’s phony. Fake. A few days ago I called the fake news the enemy of the people. Because they have no sources. They just make ’em up when there are none. I saw one story recently where they said nine people have confirmed. There are no nine people. I don’t believe there was one or two people. Nine people. And I said, Give me a break. I know the people. I know who they talk to. There were no nine people. But they say nine people… .”

A few minutes into the forty-eight-minute speech and it was already off the rails, riff sustained by repetition.

“Maybe they’re just bad at polling. Or maybe they’re not legit. It’s one or the other. They’re very smart. They’re very cunning. And they’re very dishonest… . Just to conclude”—although he would go on for thirty-seven minutes more—“it’s a very sensitive topic and they get upset when we expose their false stories. They say we can’t criticize their dishonest coverage because of the First Amendment. You know they always bring up”—he went into a falsetto voice—“*the First Amendment*. Now I love the First Amendment. Nobody loves it better than me. Nobody.”

Each member of the Trump traveling retinue was now maintaining a careful poker face. When they did break it, it was as though on a delay, given permission by the crowd’s cheering or laughter. Otherwise, they seemed not to know whether the president had in fact gotten away with his peculiar rambles.

“By the way, you folks in here, the place is packed, there are lines that go back six blocks”—there were no lines outside the crowded lobby—“I tell you that because you won't read about it. But there are lines that go back six blocks… .

"There is one allegiance that unites us all, to America, America… . We all salute with pride the same American flag … and we are all equal, equal in the eyes of Almighty God… . We're equal … and I want to thank, by the way, the evangelical community, the Christian community, communities of faith, rabbis and priests and pastors, ministers, because the support for me, as you know, was a record, not only numbers of people but percentages of those numbers who voted for Trump … an amazing outpouring and I will not disappoint you … as long as we have faith in each other and trust in God then there is no goal beyond our reach … there is no dream too large … no task too great … we are Americans and the future belongs to us … America is roaring. It's going to be bigger and better and stronger than ever before… ."

Inside the West Wing, some had idly speculated about how long he would go on if he could command time as well as language. The consensus seemed to be forever. The sound of his own voice, his lack of inhibition, the fact that linear thought and presentation turned out not at all to be necessary, the wonder that this random approach seemed to command, and his own replenishing supply of free association—all this suggested that he was limited only by everyone else's schedule and attention span.

Trump's extemporaneous moments were always existential, but more so for his aides than for him. He spoke obliviously and happily, believing himself to be a perfect pitch raconteur and public performer, while everyone with him held their breath. If a wackadoo moment occurred on the occasions—the frequent occasions—when his remarks careened in no clear direction, his staff had to go into intense method-acting response. It took absolute discipline not to acknowledge what everyone could see.

* * *

As the president finished up his speech, Richard Spencer, who in less than four months from the Trump election was on his way to becoming the most famous neo-Nazi in America since George Lincoln Rockwell, had returned to a seat in the atrium of the Gaylord Resort to argue his affinity for Donald Trump—and, he believed, vice versa.

Spencer, curiously, was one of the few people trying to ascribe an intellectual doctrine to Trumpism. Between those taking him literally but not seriously, and those taking him seriously but not literally, there was Richard Spencer. Practically speaking, he was doing both, arguing the case that if Trump and Bannon were the pilot fish for a new conservative movement, Spencer himself—the owner of altright.com and, he believed, the purest exponent of the movement—was their pilot fish, whether they knew it or not.

As close to a real-life Nazi as most reporters had ever seen, Spencer was a kind of catnip for the liberal press crowded at CPAC. Arguably, he was offering as good an explanation of Trump's anomalous politics as anyone else.

Spencer had come up through writing gigs on conservative publications, but he was hardly recognizable in any sort of official Republican or conservative way. He was a post-right-wing provocateur but with none of the dinner party waspishness or bite of Ann Coulter or Milo Yiannopoulos. They were a stagey type of reactionary. He was a real one —a genuine racist with a good education, in his case UVA, the University of Chicago, and Duke.

It was Bannon who effectively gave Spencer flight by pronouncing Breitbart to be "the platform for the alt-right"—the movement Spencer claimed to have founded, or at least owned the domain name for.

"I don't think Bannon or Trump are identitarians or alt-rightists," Spencer explained while camped out just over CPAC's property line at the Gaylord. They were not, like Spencer, philosophic racists (itself different from a knee-jerk racist). "But they are open to these ideas. And open to the people who are open to these ideas. We're the spice in the mix."

Spencer was right. Trump and Bannon, with Sessions in the mix, too, had come closer than any major national politician since the Civil Rights movement to tolerating a race-tinged political view.

"Trump has said things that conservatives never would have thought… . His criticism of the Iraq War, bashing the Bush family, I couldn't believe he did that … but he did … . Fuck them … if at the end of the day an Anglo Wasp family produces Jeb and W then clearly that's a clear sign of denegation… . And now they marry Mexicans … Jeb's wife … he married his housekeeper or something.

"In Trump's 2011 CPAC address he specifically calls for a relaxation of immigration restrictions for Europeans … that we should re-create an America that was far more stable and more beautiful… . No other conservative politician would say those things … but on the other hand pretty much everyone thought it … so it's powerful to say it… . Clearly [there's] a normalization process going on."

"We are the Trump vanguard. The left will say Trump is a nationalist and an implicit or quasi-racialist. Conservatives, because they are just so douchey, say Oh, no, of course not, he's a constitutionalist, or whatever. We on the alt-right will say, He is a nationalist and he is a racialist. His movement is a white movement. Duh."

Looking very satisfied with himself, Spencer paused and then said: "We give him a kind of permission."

* * *

Nearby, in the Gaylord atrium, Rebekah Mercer sat having a snack with her home-schooled daughter and her friend and fellow conservative donor Allie Hanley. Both women agreed that the president's CPAC speech showed him at his most gracious and charming.

10

GQLDMAN

The Jarvanka side of the White House increasingly felt that rumors leaked by Bannon and his allies were undermining them. Jared and Ivanka, ever eager to enhance their status as the adults in the room, felt personally wounded by these backdoor attacks. Kushner, in fact, now believed Bannon would do anything to destroy them. This was personal. After months of defending Bannon against liberal media innuendo, Kushner had concluded that Bannon was an anti-Semite. That was the bottom-line issue. This was a complicated and frustrating business—and quite hard to communicate to his father-in-law—because one of Bannon's accusations against Kushner, the administration's point person on the Middle East, was that he was not nearly tough enough in his defense of Israel.

After the election, the Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson with sly jocularity privately pointed out to the president that by offhandedly giving the Israel portfolio to his son-in-law—who would, Trump said, make peace in the Middle East—he hadn't really done Kushner any favors.

"I know," replied Trump, quite enjoying the joke.

Jews and Israel were a curious Trump subtext. Trump's brutish father was an often vocal anti-Semite. In the split in New York real estate between the Jews and non-Jews, the Trumps were clearly on the lesser side. The Jews were white shoe, and Donald Trump, even more than his father, was perceived as a vulgarian—after all, he put his name on his buildings, quite a déclassé thing to do. (Ironically, this proved to be a significant advance in real estate marketing and, arguably, Trump's greatest accomplishment as a developer—branding buildings.) But Trump had grown up and built his business in New York, the world's largest Jewish city. He had made his reputation in the media, that most Jewish of industries, with some keen understanding of media tribal dynamics. His mentor, Roy Cohn, was a demimonde, semiunderworld, tough-guy Jew. He courted other figures he considered "tough-guy Jews" (one of his accolades): Carl Icahn, the billionaire hedge funder; Ike Perlmutter, the billionaire investor who had bought and sold Marvel Comics; Ronald Perelman, the billionaire Revlon chairman; Steven Roth, the New York billionaire real estate tycoon; and Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino magnate. Trump had adopted a sort of 1950s Jewish uncle (tough-guy variety) delivery, with assorted Yiddishisms—Hillary Clinton, he declared, had been “shlonged” in the 2008 primary—helping to give an inarticulate man an unexpected expressiveness. Now his daughter, a de facto First Lady, was, through her conversion, the first Jew in the White House.

The Trump campaign and the White House were constantly supplying off-note messages about Jews, from their equivocal regard for David Duke to their apparent desire to tinker with Holocaust history—or at least tendency to stumble over it. At one point early in the campaign, Trump’s son-in-law, challenged by his own staff at the *New York Observer* and feeling pressure about his own bona fides, as well as seeking to stand by his father-in-law, wrote an impassioned defense of Trump in an attempt to prove that he was not an anti-Semite. For his efforts, Jared was rebuked by various members of his own family, who clearly seemed worried about both the direction of Trumpism and Jared’s opportunism.

There was also the flirtation with European populism. Whenever possible, Trump seemed to side with and stoke Europe’s rising right, with its anti-Semitic associations, piling on more portent and bad vibes. And then there was Bannon, who had allowed himself to become—through his orchestration of right-wing media themes and stoking of liberal outrage—a winking suggestion of anti-Semitism. It was certainly good right-wing business to annoy liberal Jews.

Kushner, for his part, was the prepped-out social climber who had rebuffed all entreaties in the past to support traditional Jewish organizations. When called upon, the billionaire scion had refused to contribute. Nobody was more perplexed by the sudden rise of Jared Kushner to his new position as Israel’s great protector than U.S. Jewish organizations. Now, the Jewish great and the good, the venerated and the tried, the mandarins and myrmidons, had to pay court to Jared Kushner … who until little more than a few minutes ago had truly been a nobody.

For Trump, giving Israel to Kushner was not only a test, it was a Jewish test: the president was singling him out for being Jewish, rewarding him for being Jewish, saddling him with an impossible hurdle for being Jewish—and, too, defaulting to the stereotyping belief in the negotiating powers of Jews. “Henry Kissinger says Jared is going to be the new Henry Kissinger,” Trump said more than once, rather a combined compliment and slur.

Bannon, meanwhile, did not hesitate to ding Kushner on Israel, that peculiar right-wing litmus test. Bannon could bait Jews—globalist, cosmopolitan, Davoscentric liberal Jews like Kushner—because the farther right you were, the more correct you were on Israel. Netanyahu was an old Kushner family friend, but when, in the fall, the Israeli prime minister came to New York to meet with Trump and Kushner, he made a point of seeking out Steve Bannon.

On Israel, Bannon had partnered with Sheldon Adelson, titan of Las Vegas, big-check right-wing contributor, and, in the president's mind, quite the toughest tough-guy Jew (that is, the richest). Adelson regularly disparaged Kushner's motives and abilities. The president, to Bannon's great satisfaction, kept telling his son-in-law, as he strategized on Israel, to check with Sheldon and, hence, Bannon.

Bannon's effort to grab the stronger-on-Israel label was deeply confounding to Kushner, who had been raised as an Orthodox Jew. His closest lieutenants in the White House, Avi Berkowitz and Josh Raffel, were Orthodox Jews. On Friday afternoons, all Kushner business in the White House stopped before sunset for the Sabbath observance.

For Kushner, Bannon's right-wing defense of Israel, embraced by Trump, somehow became a jujitsu piece of anti-Semitism aimed directly at him. Bannon seemed determined to make Kushner appear weak and inadequate—a cuck, in alt-right speak.

So Kushner had struck back, bringing into the White House his own tough-guy Jews—Goldman Jews.

* * *

Kushner had pushed for the then president of Goldman Sachs, Gary Cohn, to run the National Economic Council and to be the president's chief economic adviser. Bannon's choice had been CNBC's conservative anchor and commentator Larry Kudlow. For Trump, the Goldman cachet outdrew even a television personality.

It was a Richie Rich moment. Kushner had been a summer intern at Goldman when Cohn was head of commodities trading. Cohn then became president of Goldman in 2006. Once Cohn joined Trump's team, Kushner often found occasion to mention that the president of Goldman Sachs was working for him. Bannon, depending on whom he wanted to slight, either referred to Kushner as Cohn's intern or pointed out that Cohn was now working for his intern. The president, for his part, was continually pulling Cohn into meetings, especially with foreign leaders, just to introduce him as the former president of Goldman Sachs.

Bannon had announced himself as Trump's brain, a boast that vastly irritated the president. But in Cohn, Kushner saw a better brain for the White House: not only was it much more politic for Cohn to be Kushner's brain than Trump's, but installing Cohn was the perfect countermove to Bannon's chaos management philosophy. Cohn was the only person in the West Wing who had ever managed a large organization (Goldman has thirty-five thousand employees). And, not to put too fine a point on it—though Kushner was happy to do so—Bannon had rolled out of Goldman having barely reached midlevel management status, whereas Cohn, his contemporary, had continued on to the firm's highest level, making hundreds of millions of dollars in the process. Cohn—a Democrat globalist-cosmopolitan Manhattanite who voted for Hillary Clinton and who still spoke frequently to former Goldman chief and former Democratic New Jersey senator and governor Jon Corzine—immediately became Bannon's antithesis.

For Bannon, the ideologue, Cohn was the exact inverse, a commodities trader doing what traders do—read the room and figure out which way the wind is blowing. "Getting Gary to take a position on something is like nailing butterflies to the wall," commented Katie Walsh.

Cohn started to describe a soon-to-be White House that would be business-focused and committed to advancing center-right to moderate positions. In this new configuration, Bannon would be marginalized and Cohn, who was dismissive of Priebus, would be the chief of staff in waiting. To Cohn, it seemed like easy street. Of course it would work out this way: Priebus was a lightweight and Bannon a slob who couldn't run anything.

Within weeks of Cohn's arrival on the transition team, Bannon nixed Cohn's plan to expand the National Economic Council by as many as thirty people. (Kushner, not to be denied, nixed Bannon's plan to have David Bossie build and lead his staff.) Bannon also retailed the likely not-too-far-off-the-mark view (or, anyway, a popular view inside Goldman Sachs) that Cohn, once slated to become Goldman's CEO, had been forced out for an untoward Haig-like grasping for power—in 1981 then secretary of state Alexander Haig had tried to insist he held the power after Ronald Reagan was shot—when Goldman CEO Lloyd Blankfein underwent cancer treatment. In the Bannon version, Kushner had bought damaged goods. The White House was clearly Cohn's professional lifeline—why else would he have come into the Trump administration? (Much of this was retailed to reporters by Sam Nunberg, the former Trump factotum who was now doing duty for Bannon. Nunberg was frank about his tactics: "I beat the shit out of Gary whenever possible.")

It is a measure of the power of blood (or blood by marriage), and likely the power of Goldman Sachs, too, that in the middle of a Republican-controlled Washington and a virulent, if not anti-Semitic (at least toward liberal Jews), right-wing West Wing, the Kushner-Cohn Democrats appeared to be ascendant. Part of the credit went to Kushner, who showed an unexpected tenacity. Conflict averse—in the Kushner household, his father, monopolizing all the conflict, forced everyone else to be a mollifier—confronting neither Bannon nor his father-in-law, he began to see himself in a stoic sense: he was the last man of moderation, the true figure of self-effacement, the necessary ballast of the ship. This would all be made manifest by a spectacular accomplishment. He would complete the mission his father-in-law had foisted on him, the one he was more and more seeing as his, yes, destiny. He *would* make peace in the Middle East.

"He's going to make peace in the Middle East," Bannon said often, his voice reverent and his expression deadpan, cracking up all the Bannonites.

So in one sense Kushner was a figure of heightened foolishness and ridicule. In another, he was a man, encouraged by his wife and by Cohn, who saw himself on the world stage carrying out a singular mission.

Here was yet another battle to be won or lost. Bannon regarded Kushner and Cohn (and Ivanka) as occupying an alternative reality that had little bearing on the real Trump revolution. Kushner and Cohn saw Bannon as not just destructive but self-destructive, and they were confident he would destroy himself before he destroyed them.

In the Trump White House, observed Henry Kissinger, "it is a war between the Jews and the non-Jews."

* * *

For Dina Powell, the other Goldman hire in the West Wing, the main consideration when Ivanka pitched her on coming to work at the White House was the downside assessment of being associated with a Trump presidency. Powell ran the Goldman Sachs philanthropic arm, a public relations initiative as well as a courtship of the increasingly powerful pools of philanthropic money. Representing Goldman, she had become something of a legend at Davos, a supreme networker among the world's supreme networkers. She stood at an intersection of image and fortune, in a world increasingly swayed by private wealth and personal brands.

It was a function of both her ambition and Ivanka Trump's sales talents during swift meetings in New York and Washington that Powell, swallowing her doubts, had come on board. That, and the politically risky but high-return gamble that she, aligned with Jared and Ivanka, and working closely with Cohn, her Goldman friend and ally, could take over the White House. That was the implicit plan: nothing less. Specifically, the idea was that Cohn or Powell—and quite possibly both over the course of the next four or eight years—would, as Bannon and Priebus faltered, come to hold the chief of staff job. The president's own constant grumbling about Bannon and Priebus, noted by Ivanka, encouraged this scenario.

This was no small point: a motivating force behind Powell's move was the certain belief on the part of Jared and Ivanka (a belief that Cohn and Powell found convincing) that the White House was theirs to take. For Cohn and Powell, the offer to join the Trump administration was transmuted beyond opportunity and became something like duty. It would be their job, working with Jared and Ivanka, to help manage and shape a White House that might otherwise become the opposite of the reason and moderation they could bring. They could be instrumental in saving the place—and, as well, take a quantum personal leap forward.

More immediately for Ivanka, who was focused on concerns about women in the Trump White House, Powell was an image correction to Kellyanne Conway, whom, quite apart from their war with Bannon, Ivanka and Jared disdained. Conway, who continued to hold the president's favor and to be his preferred defender on the cable news shows, had publicly declared herself the face of the administration—and for Ivanka and Jared, this was a horrifying face. The president's worst impulses seem to run through Conway without benefit of a filter. She compounded Trump's anger, impulsiveness, and miscues. Whereas a presidential adviser was supposed to buffer and interpret his gut calls, Conway expressed them, doubled down on them, made opera out of them. She took Trump's demand for loyalty too literally. In Ivanka and Jared's view, Conway was a cussed, antagonistic, self-dramatizing cable head, and Powell, they hoped, would be a deliberate, circumspect, adult guest on the Sunday morning shows.

By late February, after the first helter-skelter month in the West Wing, the campaign by Jared and Ivanka to undermine Bannon seemed to be working. The couple had created a feedback loop, which included Scarborough and Murdoch, that reinforced the president's deep annoyance with and frustration about Bannon's purported importance in the White House. For weeks after the *Time* magazine cover story featuring Bannon, there was hardly a conversation in which Trump didn't refer to it bitterly. ("He views *Time* covers as zero sum," said Roger Ailes. "If someone else gets on it, he doesn't.") Scarborough, cruelly, kept up a constant patter about President Bannon. Murdoch forcefully lectured the president about the oddness and extremism of Bannonism, linking Bannon with Ailes: "They're both crazy," he told Trump.

Kushner also pressed the view to the president—ever phobic about any age-related weakness—that the sixty-three-year-old Bannon wouldn't hold up under the strain of working in the White House. Indeed, Bannon was working sixteen- and eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, and, for fear of missing a presidential summons or afraid that someone else might grab it, he considered himself on call pretty much all night. As the weeks went by, Bannon seemed physically to deteriorate in front of everybody's eyes: his face became more puffy, his legs more swollen, his eyes more bleary, his clothes more slept in, his attention more distracted.

* * *

As Trump's second month in office began, the Jared-Ivanka-Gary-Dina camp focused on the president's February 28 speech to the joint session of Congress.

"Reset," declared Kushner. "Total reset."

The occasion provided an ideal opportunity. Trump would have to deliver the speech in front of him. It was not only on the teleprompter but distributed widely beforehand. What's more, the well-mannered crowd wouldn't egg him on. His handlers were in control. And for this occasion at least, Jared-Ivanka-Gary-Dina were the handlers.

"Steve will take credit for this speech if there's even one word of his in it," Ivanka told her father. She knew well that for Trump, credit, much more than content, was the hot-button driver, and her comment ensured that Trump would keep it out of Bannon's hands.

"The Goldman speech," Bannon called it.

The inaugural, largely written by Bannon and Stephen Miller, had shocked Jared and Ivanka. But a particular peculiarity of the Trump White House, compounding its messaging problems, was its lack of a speech-writing team. There was the literate and highly verbal Bannon, who did not really do any actual writing himself; there was Stephen Miller, who did little more than produce bullet points. Beyond that, it was pretty much just catch as catch can. There was a lack of coherent message because there was nobody to write a coherent message—just one more instance of disregarding political craft.

Ivanka grabbed firm control of the joint session draft and quickly began pulling in contributions from the Jarvanka camp. In the event, the president behaved exactly as they hoped. Here was an upbeat Trump, a salesman Trump, a nothing-to-be-afraid-of Trump, a happy-warrior Trump. Jared, Ivanka, and all their allies judged it a magnificent night, agreeing that finally, amid the pageantry—*Mr. Speaker, the President of the United States*—the president really did seem presidential. And for once, even the media agreed.

The hours following the president's speech were Trump's best time in the White House. It was, for at least one news cycle, a different presidency. For a moment, there was even something like a crisis of conscience among parts of the media: Had this president been grievously misread? Had the media, the biased media, missed well-intentioned Donald Trump? Was he finally showing his better nature? The president himself spent almost two full days doing nothing but reviewing his good press. He had arrived, finally, at a balmy shore (with appreciative natives on the beach). What's more, the success of the speech confirmed the Jared and Ivanka strategy: look for common ground. It also confirmed Ivanka's understanding of her father: he just wanted to be loved. And, likewise, it confirmed Bannon's worst fear: Trump, in his true heart, was a marshmallow.

The Trump on view the night of the joint session was not just a new Trump, but a declaration of a new West Wing brain trust (which Ivanka was making plans to formally join in just a few weeks). Jared and Ivanka, with an assist from their Goldman Sachs advisers, were changing the message, style, and themes of the White House. "Reaching out" was the new theme.

Bannon, hardly helping his cause, cast himself as a Cassandra to anyone who would listen. He insisted that only disaster would come from trying to mollify your mortal enemies. You need to keep taking the fight to them; you're fooling yourself if you believe that compromise is possible. The virtue of Donald Trump—the virtue, anyway, of Donald Trump to Steve Bannon—was that the cosmopolitan elite was never going to accept him. He was, after all, Donald Trump, however much you shined him up.

11

WIRETAP

With three screens in his White House bedroom, the president was his own best cable curator. But for print he depended on Hope Hicks. Hicks, who had been his junior aide for most of the campaign and his spokesperson (although, as he would point out, he was really his own spokesperson), had been, many thought, pushed to the sidelines in the West Wing by the Bannonites, the Goldman wing, and the Priebus-RNC professionals. To the senior staff, she seemed not only too young and too inexperienced—she was famous among campaign reporters for her hard-to-maneuver-in short skirts—but a way-too-overeager yes woman, always in fear of making a mistake, ever tremulously second-guessing herself and looking for Trump's approval. But the president kept rescuing her—"Where's Hope?"—from any oblivion others tried to assign her to. Baffling to almost everyone, Hicks remained his closest and most trusted aide, with, perhaps, the single most important job in this White House: interpreting the media for him in the most positive way it could be interpreted, and buffering him from the media that could not be positively spun.

The day after his "reset" speech before the joint session of Congress presented a certain conundrum for Hicks. Here were the first generally good notices for the administration. But in the *Post*, the *Times*, and the *New Yorker* that day, there was also an ugly bouquet of very bad news. Fortunately the three different stories had not quite sunk into cable, so there was yet a brief respite. And at least for the better part of the day, March 1, Hicks herself did not entirely seem to grasp how bad the news actually was.

The *Washington Post*'s story was built around a leak from a Justice Department source (characterized as a "former senior American official"—hence, most likely someone from the Obama White House) saying that the new attorney general, Jeff Sessions, had, on two occasions, met with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak.

When the president was shown the story, he didn't see its significance. "So what?" he said.

Well, during his confirmation, it was explained to the president, Sessions had said he didn't.

Facing Sessions at the January 10 hearing, Al Franken, the former comedian and Democratic senator from Minnesota, appeared to be casting blindly for an elusive fish in his efforts to find a question. Stopping and starting, slogging through his sentence construction, Franken, who had been handed a question based on the just-revealed Steele dossier, got to this end:

> These documents also allegedly say, quote, "There was a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump's surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian government."
>
> Now, again, I'm telling you this as it's coming out, so you know. But if it's true, it's obviously extremely serious and if there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of this campaign, what will you do?

Instead of answering Franken's circuitous question—"What will you do?"—with an easy "We will of course investigate and pursue any and all illegal actions," a confused Sessions answered a question he wasn't asked.

> Senator Franken, I'm not aware of any of those activities. I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I didn't have—did not have communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment on it.

The president's immediate focus was on the question of why anyone believed that communicating with the Russians was bad. There *is* nothing wrong with that, Trump insisted. As in the past, it was hard to move him off this point and to the issue at hand: a possible lie to Congress. The *Post* story, to the extent that it registered at all, didn't worry him. Supported by Hicks, he saw it a way-long-shot effort to pin something on Sessions. And anyway, Sessions was saying he didn't meet with the Russians as *a campaign surrogate*. So? He didn't. Case closed.

"Fake news," said the president, using his now all-purpose rejoinder.

As for the bad *Times* story, as Hicks related it to the president, it appeared to him to be good news. Briefed by anonymous sources in the Obama administration (*more* anonymous Obama sources), the story revealed a new dimension to the ever growing suggestion of a connection between the Trump campaign and Russian efforts to influence the U.S. election:

> American allies, including the British and the Dutch, had provided information describing meetings in European cities between Russian officials—and others close to Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin—and associates of President-elect Trump, according to three former American officials who requested anonymity in discussing classified intelligence.

And:

> Separately, American intelligence agencies had intercepted communications of Russian officials, some of them within the Kremlin, discussing contacts with Trump associates.

The story went on:

> Mr. Trump has denied that his campaign had any contact with Russian officials, and at one point he openly suggested that American spy agencies had cooked up intelligence suggesting that the Russian government had tried to meddle in the presidential election. Mr. Trump has accused the Obama administration of hyping the Russia story line as a way to discredit his new administration.

And then the real point:

> At the Obama White House, Mr. Trump's statements stoked fears among some that intelligence could be covered up or destroyed—or its sources exposed—once power changed hands. What followed was a push to preserve the intelligence that underscored the deep anxiety with which the White House and American intelligence agencies had come to view the threat from Moscow.

Here was more confirmation of a central Trump thesis: The previous administration, its own candidate defeated, was not just disregarding the democratic custom of smoothing the way for the winner of the election; rather, in the Trump White House view, Obama's people had plotted with the intelligence community to put land mines in the new administration's way. Secret intelligence was, the story suggested, being widely distributed across intelligence agencies so as to make it easier to leak, and at the same time to protect the leakers. This intelligence, it was rumored, consisted of spreadsheets kept by Susan Rice that listed the Trump team's Russian contacts; borrowing a technique from WikiLeaks, the documents were secreted on a dozen servers in different places. Before this broad distribution, when the information was held tightly, it would have been easy to identify the small pool of leakers. But the Obama administration had significantly expanded that pool.

So this was good news, right? Wasn't this proof, the president asked, that Obama and his people were out to get him? The *Times* story was a leak about a plan to leak—and it provided clear evidence of the deep state.

Hope Hicks, as always, supported Trump's view. The crime was leaking and the culprit was the Obama administration. The Justice Department, the president was confident, was now going to investigate the former president and his people. Finally.

* * *

Hope Hicks also brought to the president a big piece in the *New Yorker*. The magazine had just published an article by three authors—Evan Osnos, David Remnick, and Joshua Yaffa

—attributing Russian aggressiveness to a new cold war. Remnick, the editor of the *New Yorker*, had, since the Trump election, propounded an absolutist view that Trump's election imperiled Democratic norms.

This 13,500-word story—handily connecting the dots of Russia's geopolitical mortification, Putin's ambition, the country's cyber talents, Trump's own nascent authoritarianism, and the U.S. intelligence community's suspicions about Putin and Russia—codified a new narrative as coherent and as apocalyptic as the one about the old cold war. The difference was that in this one, the ultimate result was Donald Trump—he was the nuclear bomb. One of the frequently quoted sources in the article was Ben Rhodes, the Obama aide who, Trump's camp believed, was a key leaker, if not one of the architects of the Obama administration's continued effort to connect Trump and his team to Putin and Russia. Rhodes, many in the White House believed, *was* the deep state. They also believed that every time a leak was credited to "former and current officials," Rhodes was the former official who was in close touch with current officials.

While the article was largely just a dire recapitulation of fears about Putin and Trump, it did, in a parenthesis toward the end of the article—quite burying the lead—connect Jared Kushner to Kislyak, the Russian ambassador, in a meeting in Trump Tower with Michael Flynn in December.

Hicks missed this point; later, it had to be highlighted for the president by Bannon.

Three people in the Trump administration—the former National Security Advisor, the current attorney general, and the president's senior adviser and son-in-law—had now been directly connected to the Russian diplomat.

To Kushner and his wife, this was less than innocent: they would, with a sense of deepening threat, suspect Bannon of leaking the information about Kushner's meeting with Kislyak.

* * *

Few jobs in the Trump administration seemed so right, fitting, and even destined to their holder as Jeff Sessions's appointment as the nation's top law enforcement officer. As he viewed his work as AG, it was his mandate to curb, circumscribe, and undo the interpretation of federal law that had for three generations undermined American culture and offended his own place in it. "This is his life's work," said Steve Bannon.

And Sessions was certainly not going to risk his job over the silly Russia business, with its growing collection of slapstick Trump figures. God knows what those characters were up to—nothing good, everybody assumed. Best to have nothing to do with it.

Without consulting the president or, ostensibly, anyone in the White House, Sessions decided to move as far as possible out of harm's way. On March 2, the day after the *Post* story, he recused himself from anything having to do with the Russia investigation.

The news of the attorney general's recusal exploded like an IED in the White House. Sessions was Trump's protection against an overly aggressive Russian investigation. The president just could not grasp the logic here. He railed to friends: Why would Sessions not want to protect him? What would Sessions gain? Did he think this stuff was real? Sessions needed to do his job!

In fact, Trump already had good reason to worry about the DOJ. The president had a private source, one of his frequent callers, who, he believed, was keeping him abreast of what was going on in the Justice Department—and, the president noted, doing a much better job of it than Sessions himself.

The Trump administration, as a consequence of the Russia story, was involved in a high-stakes bureaucratic push-pull, with the president going outside government to find out what was happening in his own government. The source, a longtime friend with his own DOJ sources—many of the president's rich and powerful friends had their own reasons to keep close tabs on what was happening at the Justice Department—fed the president a bleak picture of a Justice Department and an FBI run amok in its efforts to get him. "Treason" was a word that was being used, the president was told.

"The DOJ," the president's source told him, "was filled with women who hated him." It was an army of lawyers and investigators taking instructions from the former administration. "They want to make Watergate look like Pissgate," the president was told. This comparison confused Trump; he thought his friend was making a reference to the Steele dossier and its tale of the golden showers.

After the attorney general's recusal, the president, whose instinctive reaction to every problem was to fire someone, right away, thought he should just get rid of Sessions. At the same time, there was little doubt in his mind about what was happening here. He knew where this Russia stuff was coming from, and if these Obama people thought they were going to get away with it they had another think coming. He would expose them all!

* * *

One of Jared Kushner's many new patrons was Tony Blair, the former —British prime minister, whom Kushner had gotten to know when, on the banks of the River Jordan in 2010, they both attended the baptism of Grace and Chloe Murdoch, the young daughters of Rupert Murdoch and his then wife, Wendi. Jared and Ivanka had also lived in the same Trump building on Park Avenue where the Murdochs lived (for the Murdochs it was a temporary rental apartment while their grand triplex on Fifth Avenue was —renovated, but the renovation had lasted for four years), and during that period Ivanka Trump had become one of Wendi Murdoch's closest friends. Blair, godfather to Grace, would later be accused by Murdoch of having an affair with his wife, and of being the cause of their breakup (something Blair has categorically denied). In the divorce, Wendi got the Trumps.

But once in the White House, the president's daughter and son-in-law became the target of a renewed and eager cultivation by, with quite some irony, both Blair and Murdoch. Lacking a circle of influence in almost all of the many areas of government with which he was now involved, Kushner was both susceptible to cultivation and more than a little desperate for the advice his cultivators had to offer. Blair, now with philanthropic, private diplomatic, and varied business interests in the Middle East, was particularly intent on helping shepherd some of Jared's Middle East initiatives.

In February, Blair visited Kushner in the White House.

On this trip, the now freelance diplomat, perhaps seeking to prove his usefulness to this new White House, mentioned a juicy rumor: the possibility that the British had had the Trump campaign staff under surveillance, monitoring its telephone calls and other communications and possibly even Trump himself. This was, as Kushner might understand, the Sabbath goy theory of intelligence. On the Sabbath, observant Jews could not turn on the lights, nor ask someone else to turn on the lights. But if they expressed the view that it would be much easier to see with light, and if a non-Jew then happened to turn them on, that would be fine. So although the Obama administration would not have asked the British to spy on the Trump campaign, the Brits would have been led to understand how helpful it might be if they did.

It was unclear whether the information was rumor, informed conjecture, speculation, or solid stuff. But, as it churned and festered in the president's mind, Kushner and Bannon went out to CIA headquarters in Langley to meet with Mike Pompeo and his deputy director Gina Haspel to check it out. A few days later, the CIA opaquely reported back that the information was not correct; it was a "miscommunication."

* * *

Politics had seemed to become, even well before the age of Trump, a mortal affair. It was now zero-sum: When one side profited, another lost. One side's victory was another's death. The old notion that politics was a trader's game, an understanding that somebody else had something you wanted—a vote, goodwill, old-fashioned patronage—and that in the end the only issue was cost, had gone out of fashion. Now it was a battle between good and evil.

Curiously, for a man who seemed to have led a movement based in anger and retribution, Trump was very much (or believed he was very much) a politician of the old stripe—a let's-work-it-out guy. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. He was, in his mind, the ultimate tactician, always knowing what the other guy wanted.

Steve Bannon had pressed him to invoke Andrew Jackson as his populist model, and he had loaded up on Jackson books (they remained unread). But his real beau ideal was Lyndon Johnson. LBJ was a big man who could knock heads, do deals, and bend lesser men to his will. Trade it out so in the end everyone got something, and the better dealmaker got a little more. (Trump did not, however, appreciate the irony of where

Lyndon Johnson ended up—one of the first modern politicians to have found himself on the wrong end of both mortal and moral politics.)

But now, after little more than seven weeks in office, Trump saw his own predicament as unique and overwhelming. Like no other president before (though he did make some allowances for Bill Clinton), his enemies were out to get him. Worse, the system was rigged against him. The bureaucratic swamp, the intelligence agencies, the unfair courts, the lying media—they were all lined up against him. This was, for his senior staff, a reliable topic of conversation with him: the possible martyrdom of Donald Trump.

In the president's nighttime calls, he kept coming back to how unfair this was, and to what Tony Blair had said—and others, too! It all added up. There was a plot against him.

Now, it was certainly true that Trump's closest staff appreciated his volatility, and, to a person, was alarmed by it. At points on the day's spectrum of adverse political developments, he could have moments of, almost everyone would admit, irrationality. When that happened, he was alone in his anger and not approachable by anyone. His senior staff largely dealt with these dark hours by agreeing with him, no matter what he said. And if some of them occasionally tried to hedge, Hope Hicks never did. She agreed absolutely with all of it.

At Mar-a-Lago on the evening of March 3, the president watched Bret Baier interview Paul Ryan on Fox. Baier asked the Speaker about a report on the online news site Circa—owned by Sinclair, the conservative broadcast group—involving allegations that Trump Tower had been surveilled during the campaign.

On March 4, Trump's early morning tweets began:

> Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my "wires tapped" in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found. This is McCarthyism! (4:35 a.m.)
>
> Is it legal for a sitting President to be "wire tapping" a race for president prior to an election? Turned down by court earlier. A NEW LOW! (4:49 a.m.)
>
> How low has President Obama gone to tap my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy! (5:02 a.m.)

At 6:40 he called Priebus, waking him up. "Did you see my tweet?" he asked. "We've caught them red-handed!" Then the president held his phone so Priebus could hear the playback of the Baier show.

He had no interest in precision, or even any ability to be precise. This was pure public exclamation, a window into pain and frustration. With his misspellings and his use of 1970s lingo—"wire tapping" called up an image of FBI agents crouched in a van on Fifth Avenue—it seemed kooky and farcical. Of the many tweets that Trump had seemed to hoist himself by, from the point of view of the media, intelligence community, and extremely satisfied Democrats, the wiretap tweets had pulled him highest and most left him dangling in ignorance and embarrassment.

According to CNN, “Two former senior U.S. officials quickly dismissed Trump’s accusations out of hand. ‘Just nonsense,’ said one former senior U.S. intelligence official.” Inside the White House, the “just nonsense” quote was thought to be from Ben Rhodes, offered in cat-that-swallowed-the-canary fashion.

Ryan, for his part, told Priebus he had no idea what Baier was talking about and that he was just BSing through the interview.

But if tapping Trump’s phones wasn’t literally true, there was a sudden effort to find something that might be, and a frantic White House dished up a Breitbart article that linked to a piece by Louise Mensch, a former British politician who, now living in the United States, had become a kind of conspiracy-central of the Trump-Russia connection.

There was a further effort to push aggressive incidental collection and unmasking back onto the Obama White House. But in the end, this was another—and to some quite the ultimate—example of how difficult it was for the president to function in a literal, definitional, lawyerly, cause-and-effect political world.

It was a turning point. Until now, Trump’s inner circle had been mostly game to defend him. But after the wiretap tweets, everybody, save perhaps Hope Hicks, moved into a state of queasy sheepishness, if not constant incredulity.

Sean Spicer, for one, kept repeating his daily, if not hourly, mantra: “You can’t make this shit up.”

12

REPEAL AND REPLACE

A few days after the election, Steve Bannon told the president-elect—in what Katie Walsh would characterize with a raised eyebrow as more "Breitbart shenanigans"—that they had the votes to replace Paul Ryan as Speaker of the House with Mark Meadows, the head of the Tea Party-inspired Freedom Caucus and an early Trump supporter. (Meadows's wife had a particular place of regard in the Trump camp for continuing a campaign swing across the Bible Belt over Billy Bush weekend.)

Nearly as much as winning the presidency itself, removing Ryan—indeed, humiliating him—was an ultimate expression of what Bannon sought to accomplish and of the mind-meld of Bannonism and Trumpism. From the beginning, the Breitbart campaign *against* Paul Ryan was a central part of its campaign *for* Donald Trump. Its embrace of Trump, and Bannon's personal enlistment in the campaign fourteen months after it began, was in part because Trump, throwing political sense to the wind, was willing to lead the charge against Ryan and the GOP godfathers. Still, there was a difference between the way Breitbart viewed Ryan and the way Trump viewed him.

For Breitbart, the House rebellion and transformation that had driven the former Speaker, John Boehner, from office, and which, plausibly, was set to remake the House into the center of the new radical Republicanism had been halted by Ryan's election as Speaker. Mitt Romney's running mate, and a figure who had merged a conservative fiscal wonkishness—he had been the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and, as well, chairman of the House Budget Committee—with an old-fashioned idea of unassailable Republican rectitude, Ryan was the official last, best hope of the Republican Party. (Bannon, typically, had turned this trope into an official Trumpist talking point: "Ryan was created in a petri dish at the Heritage Foundation.") If the Republican Party had been moved further right by the Tea Party rebellion, Ryan was part of the ballast that would prevent it from moving further, or at least at a vastly slower pace. In this he represented an adult, older-brother steadiness in contrast to the Tea Party's ADD-hyper immaturity—and a stoic, almost martyrlike resistance to the Trump movement.

Where the Republican establishment had promoted Ryan into this figure of not only maturity but sagaciousness, the Tea Party-Bannon-Breitbart wing mounted an ad hominem campaign pushing an image of Ryan as uncommitted to the cause, an inept strategist and incompetent leader. He was the Tea Party-Bannon-Breitbart punch line: the ultimate empty suit, a hee-haw sort of joke and an embarrassment.

Trump's distaste for Ryan was significantly less structural. He had no views about Ryan's political abilities, and had paid no real attention to Ryan's actual positions. His view was personal. Ryan had insulted him—again and again. Ryan had kept betting against him. Ryan had become the effective symbol of the Republican establishment's horror and disbelief about Trump. Adding insult to injury, Ryan had even achieved some moral stature by dissing Trump (and, as usual, he considered anybody's gain at his expense a double insult). By the spring of 2016, Ryan was still, and by then the only, alternative to Trump as the nominee. Say the word, many Republicans felt, and the convention would stampede to Ryan. But Ryan's seemingly smarter calculation was to let Trump win the nomination, and then to emerge as the obvious figure to lead the party after Trump's historic defeat and the inevitable purge of the Tea Party-Trump-Breitbart wing.

Instead, the election destroyed Paul Ryan, at least in Steve Bannon's eyes. Trump had not only saved the Republican Party but had given it a powerful majority. The entire Bannon dream had been realized. The Tea Party movement, with Trump as its remarkable face and voice, had come to power—something like total power. It owned the Republican Party. Publicly breaking Paul Ryan was the obvious and necessary step.

But a great deal could fall into the chasm between Bannon's structural contempt for Ryan and Trump's personal resentment. If Bannon saw Ryan as being unwilling and unable to carry out the new Bannon-Trump agenda, Trump saw a chastened Ryan as suddenly and satisfyingly abject, submissive, and useful. Bannon wanted to get rid of the entire Republican establishment; Trump was wholly satisfied that it now seemed to bend to him.

"He's quite a smart guy," Trump said after his first postelection conversation with the Speaker. "A very serious man. Everybody respects him."

Ryan, "rising to a movie-version level of flattery and sucking-up painful to witness," according to one senior Trump aide, was able to delay his execution. As Bannon pressed his case for Meadows—who was significantly less yielding than Ryan—Trump dithered and then finally decided that not only was he *not* going to push for Ryan's ouster, but Ryan was going to be his man, his partner. In an example of the odd and unpredictable effects of personal chemistry on Trump—of how easy it can be to sell the salesman—Trump would now eagerly back Ryan's agenda instead of the other way around.

"I don't think that we quite calculated that the president would give him carte blanche," reflected Katie Walsh. "The president and Paul went from such a bad place during the campaign to such a romance afterward that the president was happy to go along with whatever he wanted."

It didn't exactly surprise Bannon when Trump flipped; Bannon understood how easy it was to bullshit a bullshitter. Bannon also recognized that the Ryan rapprochement spoke to Trump's new appreciation of where he found himself. It was not just that Ryan had been willing to bow to Trump, but that Trump was willing to bow to his own fears about how little he actually knew about being president. If Ryan could be counted on to handle Congress, thought the president, well, phew, that takes care of that.

* * *

Trump had little or no interest in the central Republican goal of repealing Obamacare. An overweight seventy-year-old man with various physical phobias (for instance, he lied about his height to keep from having a body mass index that would label him as obese), he personally found health care and medical treatments of all kinds a distasteful subject. The details of the contested legislation were, to him, particularly boring; his attention would begin wandering from the first words of a policy discussion. He would have been able to enumerate few of the particulars of Obamacare—other than expressing glee about the silly Obama pledge that everyone could keep his or her doctor—and he certainly could not make any kind of meaningful distinction, positive or negative, between the health care system before Obamacare and the one after.

Prior to his presidency, he had likely never had a meaningful discussion in his life about health insurance. "No one in the country, or on earth, has given less thought to health insurance than Donald," said Roger Ailes. Pressed in a campaign interview about the importance of Obamacare repeal and reform, Trump was, to say the least, quite unsure of its place on the agenda: "This is an important subject but there are a lot of important subjects. Maybe it is in the top ten. Probably is. But there is heavy competition. So you can't be certain. Could be twelve. Or could be fifteen. Definitely top twenty for sure."

It was another one of his counterintuitive connections to many voters: Obama and Hillary Clinton seemed actually to want to talk about health care plans, whereas Trump, like most everybody else, absolutely did not.

All things considered, he probably preferred the notion of more people having health insurance than fewer people having it. He was even, when push came to shove, rather more for Obamacare than for repealing Obamacare. As well, he had made a set of rash Obama-like promises, going so far as to say that under a forthcoming Trumpcare plan (he had to be strongly discouraged from using this kind of rebranding—political wise men told him that this was one instance where he might not want to claim ownership with his name), no one would lose their health insurance, and that preexisting conditions would continue to be covered. In fact, he probably favored government-funded health care more than any other Republican. "Why can't Medicare simply cover everybody?" he had impatiently wondered aloud during one discussion with aides, all of whom were careful not to react to this heresy.

It was Bannon who held the line, insisting, sternly, that Obamacare was a litmus Republican issue, and that, holding a majority in Congress, they could not face Republican voters without having made good on the by now Republican catechism of repeal. Repeal, in Bannon's view, was the pledge, and repeal would be the most satisfying, even cathartic, result. It would also be the easiest one to achieve, since virtually every Republican was already publicly committed to voting for repeal. But Bannon, seeing health care as a weak link in Bannonism-Trumpism's appeal to the workingman, was careful to take a back seat in the debate. Later, he hardly even made an effort to rationalize how he'd washed his hands of the mess, saying just, "I hung back on health care because it's not my thing."

It was Ryan who, with "repeal and replace," obfuscated the issue and won over Trump. Repeal would satisfy the Republican bottom line, while replace would satisfy the otherwise off-the-cuff pledges that Trump had made on his own. (Pay no attention to the likelihood that what the president construed as repeal and replace might be very different from what Ryan construed as repeal and replace.) "Repeal and replace" was a useful slogan, too, in that it came to have meaning without having any actual or specific meaning.

The week after the election, Ryan, bringing Tom Price—the Georgia congressman and orthopedist who had become Ryan's resident heath care expert—traveled to Trump's Bedminster, New Jersey, estate for a repeal and replace briefing. The two men summed up for Trump—who kept wandering off topic and trying to turn the conversation to golf—seven years of Republican legislative thinking about Obamacare and the Republican alternatives. Here was a perfect example of an essential Trump paradigm: he acceded to anyone who seemed to know more about any issue he didn't care about, or simply one whose details he couldn't bring himself to focus on closely. *Great!* he would say, punctuating every statement with a similar exclamation and regularly making an effort to jump from his chair. On the spot, Trump eagerly agreed to let Ryan run the health care bill and to make Price the Health and Human Services secretary.

Kushner, largely staying silent during the health care debate, publicly seemed to accept the fact that a Republican administration had to address Obamacare, but he privately suggested that he was personally against both repeal alone and repeal and replace. He and his wife took a conventional Democratic view on Obamacare (it was better than the alternatives; its problems could be fixed in the future) and strategically believed it was best for the new administration to get some easier victories under its belt before entering a hard-to-win or no-win fight. (What's more, Kushner's brother Josh ran a health insurance company that depended on Obamacare.)

Not for the last time, then, the White House would be divided along the political spectrum, Bannon taking an absolutist base position, Priebus aligned with Ryan in support of the Republican leadership, and Kushner maintaining, and seeing no contradiction in, a moderate Democratic view. As for Trump himself, here was a man who was simply trying to get out from under something he didn't especially care about.

Ryan and Priebus's salesmanship promised to get the president out from under other issues as well. Health care reform, according to the Ryan plan, was something of a magic bullet. The reform the Speaker would push through Congress would fund the tax cuts Trump had guaranteed, which, in turn, would make all that Trump-promised infrastructure investment possible.

On this basis—this domino theory that was meant to triumphantly carry the Trump administration through to the August recess and mark it as one of the most transformational presidencies in modern times—Ryan kept his job as Speaker, rising from hated campaign symbol to the administration's man on the Hill. In effect, the president, quite aware of his and his staff's inexperience in drafting legislation (in fact, nobody on his senior staff had any experience at all), decided to outsource his agenda—and to a heretofore archenemy.

Watching Ryan steal the legislative initiative during the transition, Bannon faced an early realpolitik moment. If the president was willing to cede major initiatives, Bannon would need to run a counteroperation and be ready with more Breitbart shenanigans. Kushner, for his part, developed a certain Zen—you just had to go with the president's whims. As for the president, it was quite clear that deciding between contradictory policy approaches was not his style of leadership. He simply hoped that difficult decisions would make themselves.

* * *

Bannon was not merely contemptuous of Ryan's ideology; he had no respect, either, for his craft. In Bannon's view, what the new Republican majority needed was a man like John McCormick, the Democratic Speaker of the House who had served during Bannon's teenage years and had shepherded Johnson's Great Society legislation. McCormick and other Democrats from the 1960s were Bannon's political heroes—put Tip O'Neill in that pantheon, too. An Irish Catholic working-class man was philosophically separate from aristocrats and gentry—and without aspirations to be either. Bannon venerated old-fashioned pols. He looked like one himself: liver spots, jowls, edema. And he hated modern politicians; they lacked, in addition to political talents, authenticity and soul. Ryan was an Irish Catholic altar boy who had stayed an altar boy. He had not grown up to be a thug, cop, or priest—or a true politician.

Ryan certainly wasn't a vote counter. He was a benighted figure who had no ability to see around corners. His heart was in tax reform, but as far as he could tell the only path to tax reform was through health care. But he cared so little about the issue that—just as the White House had outsourced health care to him—he outsourced the writing of the bill to insurance companies and K Street lobbyists.

In fact, Ryan had tried to act like McCormick or O'Neill, offering absolute assurances of his hold on the legislation. It was, he told the president during his several daily calls, a "done deal." Trump's trust in Ryan rose still higher, and it seemed to become in his own mind proof that he had achieved a kind of mastery over the Hill. If the president had been worried, he was worried no more. Done deal. The White House, having had to sweat hardly at all, was about to get a big victory, bragged Kushner, embracing the expected win over his dislike of the bill.

The sudden concern that the outcome might be otherwise began in early March. Katie Walsh, who Kushner now described as "demanding and petulant," began to sound the alarm. But her efforts to personally involve the president in vote collecting were blocked by Kushner in a set of increasingly tense face-offs. The unraveling had begun.

* * *

Trump still dismissively called it "the Russian thing—a whole lot of nothing." But on March 20, FBI director James Comey appeared before the House Intelligence Committee and tied the story up in a neat package:

> I have been authorized by the Department of Justice to confirm that the FBI, as part of our counterintelligence mission, is investigating the Russian government's efforts to interfere in the 2016 presidential election, and that includes investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts. As with any counter intelligence investigation, this will also include an assessment of whether any crimes were committed. Because it is an open, ongoing investigation and is classified I cannot say more about what we are doing and whose conduct we are examining.

He had, however, said quite enough. Comey converted rumor, leaks, theory, innuendo, and pundit hot air—and until this moment that was all there was, at best the hope of a scandal—into a formal pursuit of the White House. Efforts to pooh-pooh the narrative—the fake news label, the president's germaphobe defense against the golden shower accusations, the haughty dismissal of minor associates and hopeless hangers-on, the plaintive, if real, insistence that no crime had even been alleged, and the president's charge that he was the victim of an Obama wiretap—had failed. Comey himself dismissed the wiretap allegation. By the evening of Comey's appearance, it was evident to everyone that the Russia plot line, far from petering out, had a mighty and bloody life to come.

Kushner, ever mindful of his father's collision with the Justice Department, was especially agitated by Comey's increasing focus on the White House. Doing something about Comey became a Kushner theme. What can we do about him? was a constant question. And it was one he kept raising with the president.

Yet this was also—as Bannon, without too much internal success, tried to explain—a structural issue. It was an opposition move. You could express surprise at how fierce, creative, and diabolical the moves turned out to be, but you shouldn't be surprised that your enemies would try to hurt you. This was check, but far from checkmate, and you had to continue to play the game, knowing that it would be a very long one. The only way to win the game, Bannon argued, was with a disciplined strategy.

But the president, prodded here by his family, was an obsessive and not a strategist. In his mind, this was not a problem to address, this was a person to focus on: Comey. Trump eschewed abstractions and, ad hominem, zeroed in on his opponent. Comey had been a difficult puzzle for Trump: Comey had declined to have the FBI pursue charges against Clinton for her email dodge. Then, in October, Comey had single-handedly boosted Trump's fortunes with the letter reopening the Clinton email investigation.

In their personal interactions, Trump had found Comey to be a stiff—he had no banter, no game. But Trump, who invariably thought people found him irresistible, believed that Comey admired *his* banter and game. When pressed, by Bannon and others, to fire Comey as one of his early acts—an idea opposed by Kushner, and thus another bullet on Bannon's list of bad recommendations by Kushner—the president said, "Don't worry, I've got him." That is, he had no doubt that he could woo and flatter the FBI director into positive feeling for him, if not outright submission.

Some seducers are preternaturally sensitive to the signals of those they try to seduce; others indiscriminately attempt to seduce, and, by the law of averages, often succeed (this latter group of men might now be regarded as harassers). That was Trump's approach to women—pleased when he scored, unconcerned when he didn't (and, often, despite the evidence, believing that he had). And so it was with Director Comey.

In their several meetings since he took office—when Comey received a presidential hug on January 22; at their dinner on January 27, during which Comey was asked to stay on as FBI director; at their Valentine's Day chat after emptying the office of everybody else, including Sessions, Comey's titular boss—Trump was confident that he had laid on the moves. The president was all but certain that Comey, understanding that he, Trump, had his back (i.e., had let him keep his job), would have Trump's back, too.

But now this testimony. It made no sense. What *did* make sense to Trump was that Comey wanted it to be about him. He was a media whore—this Trump understood. All right, then, he, too, could play it this way.

Indeed, health care, a no-fun issue—suddenly becoming much less fun, if, as seemed increasingly possible, Ryan couldn't deliver—palled before the clarity of Comey, and the fury, enmity, and bitterness Trump, and Trump's relatives, now bore him.

Comey was the larger-than-life problem. Taking Comey down was the obvious solution. Getting Comey became the mission.

In Keystone Cops fashion, the White House enlisted House Intelligence Committee chairman Devin Nunes in a farcical effort to discredit Comey and support the wiretap theory. The scheme shortly collapsed in universal ridicule.

Bannon, taking a public hands-off with respect to both health care and Comey, began to advise reporters that the important story wasn't health care but Russia. This was cryptic advice: it was not clear whether he was trying to distract attention from the coming health care debacle, or couple it with this new dangerous variable, thus amping up the kind of chaos that he usually benefited from.

But Bannon was unequivocal about one thing. *As the Russia story unfolds*, he advised reporters, *keep your eye on Kushner*.

* * *

By mid-March, Gary Cohn had been drafted into the effort to salvage the faltering health care bill. This might have seemed like a form of hazing for Cohn, whose grasp of legislative matters was even more limited than that of most in the White House.

On Friday, March 24, the morning of the theoretical House vote for the Republican health care bill, Politico's *Playbook* characterized the chances of a vote actually coming to the floor as a "toss-up." In that morning's senior staff meeting, Cohn was asked for an assessment of where things stood and promptly said, "I think it's a toss-up."

"Really?" thought Katie Walsh. "That's what you think?"

Bannon, joining Walsh in a pitiless contempt for the White House effort, targeted Kushner, Cohn, Priebus, Price, and Ryan in a series of calls to reporters. Kushner and Cohn could, per Bannon, be counted on to run at the first sound of gunfire. (Kushner, in fact, had spent much of the week on a skiing holiday.) Priebus mouthed Ryan talking points and excuses. Price, supposedly the health care guru, was an oafish imposter; he would stand up in meetings and mumble nothing but nonsense.

These were the bad guys, setting up the administration to lose the House in 2018, thereby assuring the president's impeachment. This was vintage Bannon analysis: a certain and immediate political apocalypse that sat side by side with the potential for a half century of Bannonism-Trumpism rule.

Convinced he knew the direction of success, keenly aware of his own age and finite opportunities, and—if for no clear reason—seeing himself as a talented political infighter, Bannon sought to draw the line between believers and sell-outs, being and nothingness. For him to succeed, he needed to isolate the Ryan, Cohn, and Kushner factions.

The Bannon faction held tight on forcing a vote on the health care bill—even knowing defeat was inevitable. "I want it as a report on Ryan's job as Speaker," said Bannon. That is, a devastating report, an epic fail.

The day of the vote, Pence was sent to the Hill to make one last pitch to Meadows's

Freedom Caucus. (Ryan's people believed that Bannon was secretly urging Meadows to hold out, though earlier in the week Bannon had harshly ordered the Freedom Caucus to vote for the bill—"a silly Bannon show," according to Walsh.) At three-thirty, Ryan called the president to say he was short fifteen to twenty votes and needed to pull the vote. Bannon, backed by Mulvaney, who had become the White House's Hill operative, continued to urge an immediate vote. A defeat here would be a major defeat for the Republican leadership. That suited Bannon just fine: let them fail.

But the president backed down. Faced with this singular opportunity to make the Republican leadership the issue, and to name them as the problem, Trump wobbled, provoking in Bannon a not-so-silent rage. Ryan then leaked that it was the president who had asked him to cancel the vote.

Over the weekend, Bannon called a long list of reporters and told them—off the record, but hardly—"I don't see Ryan hanging around a long time."

* * *

After the bill had been pulled that Friday, Katie Walsh, feeling both angry and disgusted, told Kushner she wanted out. Outlining what she saw as the grim debacle of the Trump White House, she spoke with harsh candor about bitter rivalries joined to vast incompetence and an uncertain mission. Kushner, understanding that she needed to be discredited immediately, leaked that she had been leaking and hence had to be pushed out.

On Sunday evening, Walsh had dinner with Bannon in his Capitol Hill redoubt, the Breitbart Embassy, during which, to no avail, he implored her to stay. On Monday she sorted out the details with Priebus—she would leave to work part time for the RNC and part time for the Trump (c)(4), the outside campaign group. By Thursday she was gone.

Ten weeks into the new administration, the Trump White House had lost, after Michael Flynn, its second senior staff member—and the one whose job it was to actually get things done.

13

BANNON AGONISTES

He, too, felt like a prisoner, he had told Katie Walsh when she came to tell him she was leaving.

By ten weeks in, Steve Bannon's mastery of the Trump agenda, or at least of Trump himself, appeared to have crumbled. His current misery was both Catholic in nature—the self-flagellation of a man who believed he lived on a higher moral plane than all others—and fundamentally misanthropic. As an antisocial, maladjusted, post-middle-aged man, he had to make a supreme effort to get along with others, an effort that often did not go well. Most especially, he was miserable because of Donald Trump, whose cruelties, always great even when they were casual, were unbearable when he truly turned against you.

"I hated being on the campaign, I hated the transition, I hate being here in the White House," said Bannon, sitting one evening in Reince Priebus's office, on an unseasonably warm evening in early spring, with the French doors open to the arbor-covered patio where he and Priebus, now firm friends and allies in their antipathy toward Jarvanka, had set an outdoor table.

But Bannon was, he believed, here for a reason. And it was his firm belief—a belief he was unable to keep to himself, thus continually undermining his standing with the president—that his efforts had brought everybody else here. Even more important, he was the only person showing up for work every day who was committed to the purpose of actually changing the country. Changing it quickly, radically, and truly.

The idea of a split electorate—of blue and red states, of two opposing currents of values, of globalists and nationalists, of an establishment and populist revolt—was media shorthand for cultural angst and politically roiled times, and, to a large degree, for business as usual. But Bannon believed the split was literal. The United States had become a country of two hostile peoples. One would necessarily win and the other lose. Or one would dominate while the other would become marginal.

This was modern civil war—Bannon's war. The country built on the virtue and the character and the strength of the American workingman circa 1955–65 was the ideal he meant to defend and restore: trade agreements, or *trade wars*, that supported American manufacturing; immigration policies that protected American workers (and, hence, American culture, or at least America's identity from 1955 to 1965); and an international isolation that would conserve American resources and choke off the ruling class's Davos sensibility (and also save working-class military lives). This was, in the view of almost everyone but Donald Trump and the alt-right, a crazy bit of voodoo economic and political nonsense. But it was, for Bannon, a revolutionary and religious idea.

For most others in the White House, it was Bannon's pipe dream. "Steve is … Steve," became the gentle term of art for tolerating him. "A lot of stuff goes on in his head," said the president, pursuing one of his reliable conversational themes, dismissing Bannon.

But it wasn't Bannon versus everybody else so much as it was Bannon Trump versus non-Bannon Trump. If Trump, in his dark, determined, and aggressive mood, could represent Bannon and his views, he could just as easily represent nothing at all—or represent solely his own need for instant gratification. That's what the non-Bannon people understood about Trump. If the boss was happy, then a normal, incremental, two-steps-forward-one-step-back approach to politics might prevail. Even a new sort of centrism, as inimical to Bannonism as it was possible to conceive, could emerge. Bannon's pronouncements about a fifty-year rule for Trumpism might then be supplanted by the rule of Jared, Ivanka, and Goldman Sachs.

By the end of March, this was the side that was winning. Bannon's efforts to use the epic health care fail as evidence that the establishment was the enemy had hopelessly backfired. Trump saw the health care failure as his own failure, but since he didn't have failures, it couldn't be a failure, and would in fact be a success—if not now, soon. So Bannon, a Cassandra on the sidelines, was the problem.

Trump rationalized his early embrace of Bannon by heaping scorn on him—and by denying that he had ever embraced him. If there was anything wrong with his White House, it was Steve Bannon. Maligning Bannon was Trump's idea of fun. When it came to Bannon, Trump rose to something like high analysis: "Steve Bannon's problem is PR. He doesn't understand it. Everybody hates him. Because … look at him. His bad PR rubs off on other people."

The real question, of course, was how Bannon, the fuck-the-system populist, had ever come to think that he might get along with Donald Trump, the use-the-system-to-his-own-advantage billionaire. For Bannon, Trump was the game he had to play. But in truth he hardly played it—or couldn't help undermining it. While ever proclaiming it Trump's victory, he would helplessly point out that when he had joined the campaign it was facing a polling deficit that no campaign, ten weeks from election day, had ever recovered from. Trump without Bannon, according to Bannon, was Wendell Willkie.

Bannon understood the necessity not to take what otherwise might be Trump's own spotlight; he was well aware that the president meticulously logged all claims against credit that he believed solely to be his. Both he and Kushner, the two most important figures in the White House after the president, seemed professionally mute. Still, Bannon seemed to be everywhere, and the president was convinced—rightly—that it was the result of Bannon's private press operation. More often than self-mockery could sustain, Bannon referred to himself as "President Bannon." A bitter Kellyanne Conway, regularly dissed for her own spotlight grabbing, confirmed the president's observation that Bannon stepped into as many White House photo ops as possible. (Everybody seemed to keep count of everybody else's photo bombs.) Bannon also did not much bother to disguise his innumerable blind quotes, nor to make much of an effort to temper his not-so-private slurs against Kushner, Cohn, Powell, Conway, Priebus, and even the president's daughter (often, most especially, the president's daughter).

Curiously, Bannon never expressed a sideways thought about Trump—not yet. Trump's own righteousness and soundness was perhaps too central to Bannon's construct of Trumpism. Trump was the idea you had to support. This could seem to approach the traditional idea of respecting the office. In fact, it was the inverse. The man was the vessel: there was no Bannon without Trump. However much he might stand on his unique, even magical-seeming, contributions to the Trump victory, Bannon's opportunity was wholly provided by Trump's peculiar talent. He was no more than the man behind the man—Trump's Cromwell, as he put it, even though he was perfectly aware of Cromwell's fate.

But his loyalty to the idea of Trump hardly protected him from the actual Trump's constant briefs against him. The president had assembled a wide jury to weigh Bannon's fate, putting before it, in an insulting Borscht Belt style, a long list of Bannon's annoyances: "Guy looks homeless. Take a shower, Steve. You've worn those pants for six days. He says he's made money, I don't believe it." (The president, notably, never much took issue with Bannon's policy views.) The Trump administration was hardly two months old, yet every media outlet was predicting Bannon's coming defenestration.

One particularly profitable transaction with the president was to bring him new, ever harsher criticism of his chief strategist, or reports of other people criticizing him. It was important to know not to say anything positive to Trump about Bannon. Even faint praise before the "but"—"Steve is obviously smart, but …"—could produce a scowl and pout if you didn't hurry to the "but." (Then again, saying anyone was "smart" invariably incurred Trump's annoyance.) Kushner enlisted Scarborough and Brzezinski in something of a regular morning television Bannon slag-a-thon.

H. R. McMaster, the three-star general who had replaced Michael Flynn as National Security Advisor, had secured the president's pledge that he could veto members of the NSC. Kushner, a supporter of McMaster's appointment, had quickly ensured that Dina Powell, a key player in the Kushner faction, would join the NSC and Bannon would be removed.

Bannonites would, with lowered voices and certain pity, ask each other how he seemed and how he was holding up; invariably they would agree about how bad he looked, the strain etching ever deeper into his already ruined face. David Bossie thought Bannon "looked like he would die."

"I now understand what it is like to be in the court of the Tudors," reflected Bannon. On the campaign trail, he recalled, Newt Gingrich "would come with all these dumb ideas. When we won he was my new best friend. Every day a hundred ideas. When"—by spring in the White House—"I got cold, when I went through my Valley of Death, I saw him one day in the lobby and he looks down, avoiding my eyes with a kind of mumbled 'Hey, Steve.' And I say, 'What are you doing here, let's get you inside,' and he says, 'No, no, I'm fine, I'm waiting for Dina Powell.' "

Having attained the unimaginable—bringing a fierce alt-right, anti-liberal ethnopopulism into a central place in the White House—Bannon found himself face to face with the untenable: undermined by and having to answer to rich, entitled Democrats.

* * *

The paradox of the Trump presidency was that it was both the most ideologically driven and the least. It represented a deeply structural assault on liberal values—Bannon's deconstruction of the administrative state meant to take with it media, academic, and not-for-profit institutions. But from the start it also was apparent that the Trump administration could just as easily turn into a country club Republican or a Wall Street Democrat regime. Or just a constant effort to keep Donald Trump happy. Trump had his collection of pet-peeve issues, test-marketed in various media rollouts and megarallies, but none seemed so significant as his greater goal of personally coming out ahead of the game.

As the drumbeat for Bannon's removal grew, the Mercers stepped in to protect their investment in radical government overthrow and the future of Steve Bannon.

In an age when all successful political candidates are surrounded by, if not at the beck and call of, difficult, rich people pushing the bounds of their own power—and the richer they were, the more difficult they might be—Bob and Rebekah Mercer were quite onto themselves. If Trump's ascent was unlikely, the Mercers' was all the more so.

Even the difficult rich—the Koch brothers and Sheldon Adelson on the right, David Geffen and George Soros on the left—are leavened and restrained by the fact that money exists in a competitive market. Obnoxiousness has its limits. The world of the rich is, in its fashion, self-regulating. Social climbing has rules.

But among the difficult and entitled rich, the Mercers cut a path through disbelief and incredulity. Unlike other people contributing vast sums to political candidates, they were willing not to win—ever. Their bubble was their bubble.

So when they did win, by the fluke alignment of the stars for Donald Trump, they were yet pure. Now, having found themselves—by odds that were perfect-storm outlandish—in power, they were not going to give it up because Steve Bannon had hurt feelings and wasn't getting enough sleep.

Toward the end of March, the Mercers organized a set of emergency meetings. At least one of them was with the president himself. It was exactly the kind of meeting Trump usually avoided: he had no interest in personnel problems, since they put the emphasis on other people. Suddenly he was being forced to deal with Steve Bannon, rather than the other way around. What's more, it was a problem he had in part created with his constant Bannon dissing, and now he was being asked to eat crow. Even though the president kept saying he could and should fire Bannon, he was aware of the costs—a right-wing backlash of unpredictable proportions.

Trump thought the Mercers were super-strange bedfellows too. He didn't like Bob Mercer looking at him and not saying a word; he didn't like being in the same room with Mercer or his daughter. But though he refused to admit that the Mercers' decision to back him and their imposition of Bannon on the campaign in August was, likely, the event without which he would not now be in the White House, he did understand that if crossed, the Mercers and Bannon were potential world-class troublemakers.

The complexity of the Bannon-Mercer problem prompted Trump to consult two contradictory figures: Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes. Even as the president did so, perhaps he knew he would come up with a zero-sum answer.

Murdoch, already briefed by Kushner, said getting rid of Bannon was the only way to deal with the dysfunction in the White House. (Murdoch, of course, made the assumption that getting rid of Kushner was not an option.) It was the inevitable outcome, so do it now. Murdoch's response made perfect sense: by now, he had become an active political supporter of the Kushner-Goldman moderates, seeing them as the people who would save the world from Bannon and, indeed, from Trump as well.

Ailes, blunt and declarative as always, said, "Donald, you can't do it. You've made your bed and Steve is in it. You don't have to listen to him, you don't have to even get along with him. But you're married to him. You can't handle a divorce right now."

Jared and Ivanka were gleeful at the prospect of Bannon's ouster. His departure would return the Trump organization to pure family control—the family and its functionaries, without an internal rival for brand meaning and leadership. From the family's point of view, it would also—at least in theory—help facilitate one of the most implausible brand shifts in history: Donald Trump to respectability. The dream, long differed, of the Trump pivot, might actually happen without Bannon. Never mind that this Kushner ideal—saving Trump from himself and projecting Jared and Ivanka into the future—was nearly as far-fetched and extreme as Bannon's own fantasy of a White House dedicated to the return of a pre-1965 American mythology.

If Bannon were to go, it also might cause the ultimate split in the already fractured Republican Party. Before the election, one theory suggested that a defeated Trump would take his embittered 35 percent and make hay with a rancorous minority. Now the alarming theory was that as Kushner tried to transform his father-in-law into the kind of latter-day Rockefeller that Trump, however implausibly, had on occasion dreamed of becoming (Rockefeller Center being an inspiration for his own real estate branding), Bannon could run off with some meaningful part of that 35 percent.

This was the Breitbart threat. The Breitbart organization remained under the control of the Mercers, and it could at any moment be handed back to Steve Bannon. And now, with Bannon's overnight transformation into political genius and kingmaker, and the triumph of the alt-right, Breitbart was potentially much more powerful. Trump's victory had, in some sense, handed the Mercers the tool with which to destroy him. As push came to shove and the mainstream media and swamp bureaucracy more and more militantly organized against him, Trump was certainly going to need the Mercer-backed alt-right standing up in his defense. What, after all, was he without them?

As the pressure mounted, Bannon—until now absolutely disciplined in his regard for Donald Trump as the ideal avatar of Trumpism (and Bannonism), rigidly staying in character as aide and supporter of a maverick political talent—began to crack. Trump, as almost anyone who had ever worked for him appreciated, was, despite what you hoped he might be, Trump—and he would invariably sour on everyone around him.

But the Mercers dug in. Without Bannon, they believed the Trump presidency, at least the Trump presidency they had imagined (and helped pay for), was over. The focus became how to make Steve's life better. They made him pledge to leave the office at a reasonable time—no more waiting around for Trump to possibly need a dinner companion. (Recently, Jared and Ivanka had been heading this off anyway.) The solution included a search for a Bannon's Bannon—a chief strategist for the chief strategist.

In late March, the Mercers came to an agreed-upon truce with the president: Bannon would not be fired. While this guaranteed nothing about his influence and standing, it did buy Bannon and his allies some time. They could regroup. A presidential aide was only as good as the last good advice he gave, and in this, Bannon believed the ineptness of his rivals, Kushner and his wife, would seal their fate.

* * *

Though the president agreed not to fire Bannon, he gave Kushner and his daughter something in exchange: he would enhance both their roles.

On March 27, the Office of American Innovation was created and Kushner was put in charge. Its stated mission was to reduce federal bureaucracy—that is, to reduce it by creating more of it, a committee to end committees. In addition, Kushner's new outfit would study the government's internal technology, focus on job creation, encourage and suggest policies about apprenticeships, enlist business in a partnership with government, and help with the opioid epidemic. It was, in other words, business as usual, albeit with a new burst of enthusiasm for the administrative state.

But its real import was that it gave Kushner his own internal White House staff, a team of people working not just on Kushner-supported projects—all largely antithetical to Bannon projects—but, more broadly, as Kushner explained to one staffer, "on expanding my footprint." Kushner even got his own "comms person," a dedicated spokesperson and Kushner promoter. It was a bureaucratic build-out meant not only to enhance Kushner but to diminish Steve Bannon.

Two days after the announcement about Jared's expanded power base, Ivanka was formally given a White House job, too: adviser to the president. From the beginning she had been a key adviser to her husband—and he to her. Still, it was an overnight consolidation of Trump family power in the White House. It was, quite at Steve Bannon's expense, a remarkable bureaucratic coup: a divided White House had now all but been united under the president's family.

His son-in-law and daughter hoped—they were even confident—that they could speak to DJT's better self, or at least balance Republican needs with progressive rationality, compassion, and good works. Further, they could support this moderation by routing a steady stream of like-minded CEOs through the Oval Office. And, indeed, the president seldom disagreed with and was often enthusiastic about the Jared and Ivanka program. "If they tell him the whales need to be saved, he's basically for it," noted Katie Walsh.

But Bannon, suffering in his internal exile, remained convinced that he represented what Donald Trump actually believed, or, more accurately, what the president felt. He knew Trump to be a fundamentally emotional man, and he was certain that the deepest part of him was angry and dark. However much the president wanted to support his daughter and her husband's aspirations, their worldview was not his. As Walsh saw it, "Steve believes he is Darth Vader and that Trump is called to the dark side."

Indeed, Trump's fierce efforts to deny Bannon's influence may well have been in inverse proportion to the influence Bannon actually had.

The president did not truly listen to anybody. The more you talked, the less he listened. "But Steve is careful about what he says, and there is something, a timbre in his voice and his energy and excitement, that the president can really hone in on, blocking everything else out," said Walsh.

As Jared and Ivanka were taking a victory lap, Trump signed Executive Order 13783, a change in environmental policy carefully shepherded by Bannon, which, he argued, effectively gutted the National Environmental Policy Act, the 1970 law that served as the foundation of modern environmental protections and that required all executive agencies to prepare environmental impact statements for agency actions. Among other impacts, EO

13783 removed a prior directive to consider climate change—a precursor to coming debates on the country's position regarding the Paris Climate Accord.

On April 3, Kushner unexpectedly turned up in Iraq, accompanying Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to the White House press office, Kushner was "traveling on behalf of the president to express the president's support and commitment to the government of Iraq and U.S. personnel currently engaged in the campaign." Kushner, otherwise a remote and clammed-up media presence, was copiously photographed throughout the trip.

Bannon, watching one of the many television screens that provided a constant background in the West Wing, glimpsed Kushner wearing a headset while flying in a helicopter over Baghdad. To no one in particular, recalling a foolish and callow George W. Bush in flight gear on the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* proclaiming the end of the Iraq War, he intoned, "Mission accomplished."

Gritting his teeth, Bannon saw the structure of the White House moving in the exact opposite direction from Trumpism-Bannonism. But even now, he was certain he perceived the real impulses of the administration coming his way. It was Bannon, stoic and resolute, the great if unheralded warrior, who, at least in his own mind, was destined to save the nation.

14

SITUATION ROOM

Just before seven o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, April 4, the seventy-fourth day of the Trump presidency, Syrian government forces attacked the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun with chemical weapons. Scores of children were killed. It was the first time a major outside event had intruded into the Trump presidency.

Most presidencies are shaped by external crises. The presidency, in its most critical role, is a reactive job. Much of the alarm about Donald Trump came from the widespread conviction that he could not be counted on to be cool or deliberate in the face of a storm. He had been lucky so far: ten weeks in, and he had not been seriously tested. In part this might have been because the crises generated from inside the White House had overshadowed all outside contenders.

Even a gruesome attack, even one on children in an already long war, might not yet be a presidential game changer of the kind that everyone knew would surely come. Still, these were chemical weapons launched by a repeat offender, Bashar al-Assad. In any other presidency, such an atrocity would command a considered and, ideally, skillful response. Obama's consideration had in fact been less than skillful in proclaiming the use of chemical weapons as a red line—and then allowing it to be crossed.

Almost nobody in the Trump administration was willing to predict how the president might react—or even whether he would react. Did he think the chemical attack important or unimportant? No one could say.

If the Trump White House was as unsettling as any in American history, the president's views of foreign policy and the world at large were among its most random, uninformed, and seemingly capricious aspects. His advisers didn't know whether he was an isolationist or a militarist, or whether he could distinguish between the two. He was enamored with generals and determined that people with military command experience take the lead in foreign policy, but he hated to be told what to do. He was against nation building, but he believed there were few situations that he couldn't personally make better. He had little to no experience in foreign policy, but he had no respect for the experts, either.

Suddenly, the question of how the president might respond to the attack in Khan Sheikhoun was a litmus test for normality and those who hoped to represent it in Trump's White House. Here was the kind of dramatic juxtaposition that might make for a vivid and efficient piece of theater: people working in the Trump White House who were trying to behave normally.

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Surprisingly, perhaps, there were quite a few such people.

Acting normal, embodying normality—doing things the way a striving, achieving, rational person would do them—was how Dina Powell saw her job in the White House. At forty-three, Powell had made a career at the intersection of the corporate world and public policy; she did well (very, very well) by doing good. She had made great strides in George W. Bush's White House and then later at Goldman Sachs. Returning to the White House at a penultimate level, with at least a chance of rising to one of the country's highest unelected positions, would potentially be worth enormous sums when she returned to the corporate world.

In Trumpland, however, the exact opposite could happen. Powell's carefully cultivated reputation, her brand (and she was one of those people who thought intently about their personal brand), could become inextricably tied to the Trump brand. Worse, she could become part of what might easily turn into historical calamity. Already, for many people who knew Dina Powell—and everybody who was anybody knew Dina Powell—the fact that she had taken a position in the Trump White House indicated either recklessness or seriously bad judgment.

"How," wondered one of her longtime friends, "does she rationalize this?" Friends, family, and neighbors asked, silently or openly, *Do you know what you're doing? And how* could *you? And why* would *you?*

Here was the line dividing those whose reason for being in the White House was a professed loyalty to the president from the professionals they had needed to hire. Bannon, Conway, and Hicks—along with an assortment of more or less peculiar ideologues that had attached themselves to Trump and, of course, his family, all people without clearly monetizable reputations before their association with Trump—were, for better or worse, hitched to him. (Even among dedicated Trumpers there was always a certain amount of holding their breath and constant reexamination of their options.) But those within the larger circle of White House influence, those with some stature or at least an imagined stature, had to work through significantly more complicated contortions of personal and career justification.

Often they wore their qualms on their sleeves. Mick Mulvaney, the OMB director, made a point of stressing the fact that he worked in the Executive Office Building, not the West Wing. Michael Anton, holding down Ben Rhodes's former job at the NSC, had perfected a deft eye roll (referred to as the Anton eye roll). H. R. McMaster seemed to wear a constant grimace and have perpetual steam rising from his bald head. (“What’s wrong with him?” the president often asked.)

There was, of course, a higher rationale: the White House needed normal, sane, logical, adult professionals. To a person, these pros saw themselves bringing positive attributes—rational minds, analytic powers, significant professional experience—to a situation sorely lacking those things. They were doing their bit to make things more normal and, therefore, more stable. They were bulwarks, or saw themselves that way, against chaos, impulsiveness, and stupidity. They were less Trump supporters than an antidote to Trump.

“If it all starts going south—more south than it is already going—I have no doubt that Joe Hagin would himself take personal responsibility, and do what needed to be done,” said a senior Republican figure in Washington, in an effort at self-reassurance, about the former Bush staffer who now served as Trump’s deputy chief of staff for operations.

But this sense of duty and virtue involved a complicated calculation about your positive effect on the White House versus its negative effect on you. In April, an email originally copied to more than a dozen people went into far wider circulation when it was forwarded and reforwarded. Purporting to represent the views of Gary Cohn and quite succinctly summarizing the appalled sense in much of the White House, the email read:

> It’s worse than you can imagine. An idiot surrounded by clowns. Trump won’t read anything—not one-page memos, not the brief policy papers; nothing. He gets up halfway through meetings with world leaders because he is bored. And his staff is no better. Kushner is an entitled baby who knows nothing. Bannon is an arrogant prick who thinks he’s smarter than he is. Trump is less a person than a collection of terrible traits. No one will survive the first year but his family. I hate the work, but feel I need to stay because I’m the only person there with a clue what he’s doing. The reason so few jobs have been filled is that they only accept people who pass ridiculous purity tests, even for midlevel policy-making jobs where the people will never see the light of day. I am in a constant state of shock and horror.

Still, the mess that might do serious damage to the nation, and, by association, to your own brand, might be transcended if you were seen as the person, by dint of competence and professional behavior, taking control of it.

Powell, who had come into the White House as an adviser to Ivanka Trump, rose, in weeks, to a position on the National Security Council, and was then, suddenly, along with Cohn, her Goldman colleague, a contender for some of the highest posts in the administration.

At the same time, both she and Cohn were spending a good deal of time with their ad hoc outside advisers on which way they might jump out of the White House. Powell could eye seven-figure comms jobs at various Fortune 100 companies, or a C-suite future at a tech company—Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, after all, had a background in corporate philanthropy and in the Obama administration. Cohn, on his part, already a centamillionaire, was thinking about the World Bank or the Fed.

Ivanka Trump—dealing with some of the same personal and career considerations as Powell, except without a viable escape strategy—was quite in her own corner. Inexpressive and even botlike in public but, among friends, discursive and strategic, Ivanka had become both more defensive about her father and more alarmed by where his White House was heading. She and her husband blamed this on Bannon and his let-Trump-be-Trump philosophy (often interpreted as let Trump be Bannon). The couple had come to regard him as more diabolical than Rasputin. Hence it was their job to keep Bannon and the ideologues from the president, who, they believed, was, in his heart, a practical-minded person (at least in his better moods), swayed only by people preying on his short attention span.

In mutually codependent fashion, Ivanka relied on Dina to suggest management tactics that would help her handle her father and the White House, while Dina relied on Ivanka to offer regular assurances that not everyone named Trump was completely crazy. This link meant that within the greater West Wing population, Powell was seen as part of the much tighter family circle, which, while it conferred influence, also made her the target of ever sharper attacks. "She will expose herself as being totally incompetent," said a bitter Katie Walsh, seeing Powell as less a normalizing influence than another aspect of the abnormal Trump family power play.

And indeed, both Powell and Cohn had privately concluded that the job they both had their eye on—chief of staff, that singularly necessary White House management position—would always be impossible to perform if the president's daughter and son-in-law, no matter how much they were allied to them, were in de facto command whenever they wanted to exert it.

Dina and Ivanka were themselves spearheading an initiative that, otherwise, would have been a fundamental responsibility of the chief of staff: controlling the president's information flow.

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The unique problem here was partly how to get information to someone who did not (or could not or would not) read, and who at best listened only selectively. But the other part of the problem was how best to qualify the information that he liked to get. Hope Hicks, after more than a year at this side, had honed her instincts for the kind of information—the clips—that would please him. Bannon, in his intense and confiding voice, could insinuate himself into the president's mind. Kellyanne Conway brought him the latest outrages against him. There were his after-dinner calls—the billionaire chorus. And then cable, itself programmed to reach him—to court him or enrage him.

The information he did not get was formal information. The data. The details. The options. The analysis. He didn't do PowerPoint. For anything that smacked of a classroom or of being lectured to—"professor" was one of his bad words, and he was proud of never going to class, never buying a textbook, never taking a note—he got up and left the room.

This was a problem in multiple respects—indeed, in almost all the prescribed functions of the presidency. But perhaps most of all, it was a problem in the evaluation of strategic military options.

The president liked generals. The more fruit salad they wore, the better. The president was very pleased with the compliments he got for appointing generals who commanded the respect that Mattis and Kelly and McMaster were accorded (pay no attention to Michael Flynn). What the president did not like was *listening* to generals, who, for the most part, were skilled in the new army jargon of PowerPoint, data dumps, and McKinsey-like presentations. One of the things that endeared Flynn to the president was that Flynn, quite the conspiracist and drama queen, had a vivid storytelling sense.

By the time of the Syrian attack on Khan Sheikhoun, McMaster had been Trump's National Security Advisor for only about six weeks. Yet his efforts to inform the president had already become an exercise in trying to tutor a recalcitrant and resentful student. Recently Trump's meetings with McMaster had ended up in near acrimony, and now the president was telling several friends that his new National Security Advisor was too boring and that he was going to fire him.

McMaster had been the default choice, a fact that Trump kept returning to: Why had he hired him? He blamed his son-in-law.

After the president fired Flynn in February, he had spent two days at Mar-a-Lago interviewing replacements, badly taxing his patience.

John Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and Bannon's consistent choice, made his aggressive light-up-the-world, go-to-war pitch.

Then Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen Jr., superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point, presented himself with what Trump viewed positively as old-fashioned military decorum. *Yes, sir. No, sir. That's correct, sir. Well, I think we know China has some problems, sir.* And in short order it seemed that Trump was selling Caslen on the job.

"That's the guy I want," said Trump. "He's got the look."

But Caslen demurred. He had never really had a staff job. Kushner thought he might not be ready.

"Yeah, but I liked that guy," pressed Trump.

Then McMaster, wearing a uniform with his silver star, came in and immediately launched into a wide-ranging lecture on global strategy. Trump was soon, and obviously, distracted, and as the lecture continued he began sulking.

"That guy bores the shit out of me," announced Trump after McMaster left the room. But Kushner pushed him to take another meeting with McMaster, who the next day showed up without his uniform and in a baggy suit.

"He looks like a beer salesman," Trump said, announcing that he would hire McMaster but didn't want to have another meeting with him.

Shortly after his appointment, McMaster appeared on *Morning Joe*. Trump saw the show and noted admiringly, "The guy sure gets good press."

The president decided he had made a good hire.

* * *

By midmorning on April 4, a full briefing had been assembled at the White House for the president about the chemical attacks. Along with his daughter and Powell, most members of the president's inner national security circle saw the bombing of Khan Sheikhoun as a straightforward opportunity to register an absolute moral objection. The circumstance was unequivocal: Bashar al-Assad's government, once again defying international law, had used chemical weapons. There was video documenting the attack and substantial agreement among intelligence agencies about Assad's responsibility. The politics were right: Barack Obama failed to act when confronted with a Syrian chemical attack, and now Trump could. The downside was small; it would be a contained response. And it had the added advantage of seeming to stand up to the Russians, Assad's effective partners in Syria, which would score a political point at home.

Bannon, at perhaps his lowest moment of influence in the White House—many still felt that his departure was imminent—was the only voice arguing against a military response. It was a purist's rationale: keep the United States out of intractable problems, and certainly don't increase our involvement in them. He was holding the line against the rising business-as-usual faction, making decisions based on the same set of assumptions, Bannon believed, that had resulted in the Middle East quagmire. It was time to break the standard-response pattern of behavior, represented by the Jarvanka-Powell-Cohn-McMaster alliance. Forget normal—in fact, to Bannon, normal was precisely the problem.

The president had already agreed to McMaster's demand that Bannon be removed from the National Security Council, though the change wouldn't be announced until the following day. But Trump was also drawn to Bannon's strategic view: Why do anything, if you don't have to? Or, why would you do something that doesn't actually get you anything? Since taking office, the president had been developing an intuitive national security view: keep as many despots who might otherwise screw you as happy as possible. A self-styled strongman, he was also a fundamental appeaser. In this instance, then, why cross the Russians?

By the afternoon, the national security team was experiencing a sense of rising panic: the president, in their view, didn't seem to be quite registering the situation. Bannon wasn't helping. His hyperrationalist approach obviously appealed to the not-always-rational president. A chemical attack didn't change the circumstances on the ground, Bannon argued; besides, there had been far worse attacks with far more casualties than this one. If you were looking for broken children, you could find them anywhere. Why these broken children?

The president was not a debater—well, not in any Socratic sense. Nor was he in any conventional sense a decision maker. And certainly he was not a student of foreign policy views and options. But this was nevertheless turning into a genuine philosophical face-off.

"Do nothing" had long been viewed as an unacceptable position of helplessness by American foreign policy experts. The instinct to do something was driven by the desire to prove you were not limited to nothing. You couldn't do nothing and show strength. But Bannon's approach was very much "A pox on all your houses," it was not our mess, and judging by all recent evidence, no good would come of trying to help clean it up. That effort would cost military lives with no military reward. Bannon, believing in the need for a radical shift in foreign policy, was proposing a new doctrine: Fuck 'em. This iron-fisted isolationism appealed to the president's transactional self: What was in it for us (or for him)?

Hence the urgency to get Bannon off the National Security Council. The curious thing is that in the beginning he was thought to be much more reasonable than Michael Flynn, with his fixation on Iran as the source of all evil. Bannon was supposed to babysit Flynn. But Bannon, quite to Kushner's shock, had not just an isolationist worldview but an apocalyptic one. Much of the world would burn and there was nothing you could do about it.

The announcement of Bannon's removal was made the day after the attack. That in itself was a rather remarkable accomplishment on the part of the moderates. In little more than two months, Trump's radical, if not screwball, national security leadership had been replaced by so-called reasonable people.

The job was now to bring the president into this circle of reason.

* * *

As the day wore on, both Ivanka Trump and Dina Powell were united in their determination to persuade the president to react … normally. At the very minimum, an absolute condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, a set of sanctions, and, ideally, a military response—although not a big one. None of this was in any way exceptional. Which was sort of the point: it was critical not to respond in a radical, destabilizing way—including a radical nonresponse.

Kushner was by now complaining to his wife that her father just didn't get it. It had even been difficult to get a consensus on releasing a firm statement about the unacceptability of the use of chemical weapons at the noon press briefing. To both Kushner and McMaster it seemed obvious that the president was more annoyed about having to think about the attack than by the attack itself.

Finally, Ivanka told Dina they needed to show the president a different kind of presentation. Ivanka had long ago figured out how to make successful pitches to her father. You had to push his enthusiasm buttons. He may be a businessman, but numbers didn't do it for him. He was not a spreadsheet jockey—his numbers guys dealt with spreadsheets. He liked big names. He liked the big picture—he liked *literal* big pictures. He liked to see it. He liked "impact."

But in one sense, the military, the intelligence community, and the White House's national security team remained behind the times. Theirs was a data world rather than a picture world. As it happened, the attack on Khan Sheikhoun had produced a wealth of visual evidence. Bannon might be right that this attack was no more mortal than countless others, but by focusing on this one and curating the visual proof, this atrocity became singular.

Late that afternoon, Ivanka and Dina created a presentation that Bannon, in disgust, characterized as pictures of kids foaming at the mouth. When the two women showed the presentation to the president, he went through it several times. He seemed mesmerized.

Watching the president's response, Bannon saw Trumpism melting before his eyes. Trump—despite his visceral resistance to the establishment ass-covering and standard-issue foreign policy expertise that had pulled the country into hopeless wars—was suddenly putty. After seeing all the horrifying photos, he immediately adopted a completely conventional point of view: it seemed inconceivable to him that we couldn't do something.

That evening, the president described the pictures in a call to a friend—the foam, all that foam. *These are just kids*. He usually displayed a consistent contempt for anything but overwhelming military response; now he expressed a sudden, wide-eyed interest in all kinds of other military options.

On Wednesday, April 5, Trump received a briefing that outlined multiple options for how to respond. But again McMaster burdened him with detail. He quickly became frustrated, feeling that he was being manipulated.

The following day, the president and several of his top aides flew to Florida for a meeting with the Chinese president, Xi Jinping—a meeting organized by Kushner with the help of Henry Kissinger. While aboard Air Force One, he held a tightly choreographed meeting of the National Security Council, tying into the staff on the ground. By this point, the decision about how to respond to the chemical attack had already been made: the military would launch a Tomahawk cruise missile strike at Al Shayrat airfield. After a final round of discussion, while on board, the president, almost ceremonially, ordered the strike for the next day.

With the meeting over and the decision made, Trump, in a buoyant mood, came back to chat with reporters traveling with him on Air Force One. In a teasing fashion, he declined to say what he planned to do about Syria. An hour later, Air Force One landed and the president was hustled to Mar-a-Lago.

The Chinese president and his wife arrived for dinner shortly after five o'clock and were greeted by a military guard on the Mar-a-Lago driveway. With Ivanka supervising arrangements, virtually the entire White House senior staff attended.

During a dinner of Dover sole, haricots verts, and thumbelina carrots—Kushner seated with the Chinese first couple, Bannon at the end of the table—the attack on Al Shayrat airfield was launched.

Shortly before ten, the president, reading straight off the teleprompter, announced that the mission had been completed. Dina Powell arranged a for-posterity photo of the president with his advisers and national security team in the makeshift situation room at Mar-a-Lago. She was the only woman in the room. Steve Bannon glowered from his seat at the table, revolted by the stagecraft and the "phoniness of the fucking thing."

It was a cheerful and relieved Trump who mingled with his guests among the palm trees and mangroves. "That was a big one," he confided to a friend. His national security staff were even more relieved. The unpredictable president seemed almost predictable. The unmanageable president, manageable.

15

MEDIA

On April 19, Bill O'Reilly, the Fox anchor and the biggest star in cable news, was pushed out by the Murdoch family over charges of sexual harassment. This was a continuation of the purge at the network that had begun nine months before with the firing of its chief, Roger Ailes. Fox achieved its ultimate political influence with the election of Donald Trump, yet now the future of the network seemed held in a peculiar Murdoch family limbo between conservative father and liberal sons.

A few hours after the O'Reilly announcement, Ailes, from his new oceanfront home in Palm Beach—precluded by his separation agreement with Fox from any efforts to compete with it for eighteen months—sent an emissary into the West Wing with a question for Steve Bannon: *O'Reilly and Hannity are in, what about you?* Ailes, in secret, had been plotting his comeback with a new conservative network. Currently in internal exile inside the White House, Bannon—"the next Ailes"—was all ears.

This was not just the plotting of ambitious men, seeking both opportunity and revenge; the idea for a new network was also driven by an urgent sense that the Trump phenomenon was about, as much as anything else, right-wing media. For twenty years, Fox had honed its populist message: liberals were stealing and ruining the country. Then, just at the moment that many liberals—including Rupert Murdoch's sons, who were increasingly in control of their father's company—had begun to believe that the Fox audience was beginning to age out, with its anti-gay-marriage, anti-abortion, anti-immigrant social message, which seemed too hoary for younger Republicans, along came Breitbart News. Breitbart not only spoke to a much younger right-wing audience—here Bannon felt he was as much in tune with this audience as Ailes was with his—but it had turned this audience into a huge army of digital activists (or social media trolls).

As right-wing media had fiercely coalesced around Trump—readily excusing all the ways he might contradict the traditional conservative ethos—mainstream media had become as fiercely resistant. The country was divided as much by media as by politics. Media was the avatar of politics. A sidelined Ailes was eager to get back in the game. This was his natural playing field: (1) Trump's election proved the power of a significantly smaller but more dedicated electoral base—just as, in cable television terms, a smaller hardcore base was more valuable than a bigger, less committed one; (2) this meant an inverse dedication by an equally small circle of passionate enemies; (3) hence, there would be blood.

If Bannon was as finished as he appeared in the White House, this was his opportunity, too. Indeed, the problem with Bannon's $1.5 million a year Internetcentric Breitbart News was that it couldn't be monetized or scaled up in a big way, but with O'Reilly and Hannity on board, there could be television riches fueled by, into the foreseeable future, a new Trump-inspired era of right-wing passion and hegemony.

Ailes's message to his would-be protégé was plain: Not just the rise of Trump, but the fall of Fox could be Bannon's moment.

In reply, Bannon let Ailes know that for now, he was trying to hold on to his position in the White House. But yes, the opportunity was obvious.

* * *

Even as O'Reilly's fate was being debated by the Murdochs, Trump, understanding O'Reilly's power and knowing how much O'Reilly's audience overlapped with his own base, had expressed his support and approval—"I don't think Bill did anything wrong… . He is a good person," he told the *New York Times*.

But in fact a paradox of the new strength of conservative media was Trump himself. During the campaign, when it suited him, he had turned on Fox. If there were other media opportunities, he took them. (In the recent past, Republicans, particularly in the primary season, paid careful obeisance to Fox over other media outlets.) Trump kept insisting that he was bigger than just conservative media.

In the past month, Ailes, a frequent Trump caller and after-dinner adviser, had all but stopped speaking to the president, piqued by the constant reports that Trump was bad-mouthing him as he praised a newly attentive Murdoch, who had, before the election, only ever ridiculed Trump.

"Men who demand the most loyalty tend to be the least loyal pricks," noted a sardonic Ailes (a man who himself demanded lots of loyalty).

The conundrum was that conservative media saw Trump as its creature, while Trump saw himself as a star, a vaunted and valued product of all media, one climbing ever higher. It was a cult of personality, and he was the personality. He was the most famous man in the world. Everybody loved him—or ought to.

On Trump's part this was, arguably, something of a large misunderstanding about the nature of conservative media. He clearly did not understand that what conservative media elevated, liberal media would necessarily take down. Trump, goaded by Bannon, would continue to do the things that would delight conservative media and incur the wrath of liberal media. That was the program. The more your supporters loved you, the more your antagonists hated you. That's how it was supposed to work. And that's how it was working.

But Trump himself was desperately wounded by his treatment in the mainstream media. He obsessed on every slight until it was overtaken by the next slight. Slights were singled out and replayed again and again, his mood worsening with each replay (he was always rerunning the DVR). Much of the president's daily conversation was a repetitive rundown of what various anchors and hosts had said about him. And he was upset not only when he was attacked, but when the people around him were attacked. But he did not credit their loyalty, or blame himself or the nature of liberal media for the indignities heaped on his staffers; he blamed them and their inability to get good press.

Mainstream media's self-righteousness and contempt for Trump helped provide a tsunami of clicks for right-wing media. But an often raging, self-pitying, tormented president had not gotten this memo, or had failed to comprehend it. He was looking for media love everywhere. In this, Trump quite profoundly seemed unable to distinguish between his political advantage and his personal needs—he thought emotionally, not strategically.

The great value of being president, in his view, was that you're the most famous man in the world, and fame is always venerated and adored by the media. Isn't it? But, confusingly, Trump was president in large part because of his particular talent, conscious or reflexive, to alienate the media, which then turned him into a figure reviled by the media. This was not a dialectical space that was comfortable for an insecure man.

"For Trump," noted Ailes, "the media represented power, much more so than politics, and he wanted the attention and respect of its most powerful men. Donald and I were really quite good friends for more than 25 years, but he would have preferred to be friends with Murdoch, who thought he was a moron—at least until he became president."

* * *

The White House Correspondents' Dinner was set for April 29, the one hundredth day of the Trump administration. The annual dinner, once an insiders' event, had become an opportunity for media organizations to promote themselves by recruiting celebrities—most of whom had nothing to do with journalism or politics—to sit at their tables. This had resulted in a notable Trump humiliation when, in 2011, Barack Obama singled out Trump for particular mockery. In Trump lore, this was the insult that pushed him to make the 2016 run.

Not long after the Trump team's arrival in the White House, the Correspondents' Dinner became a cause for worry. On a winter afternoon in Kellyanne Conway's upstairs West Wing office, Conway and Hope Hicks engaged in a pained discussion about what to do.

The central problem was that the president was neither inclined to make fun of himself, nor particularly funny himself—at least not, in Conway's description, "in that kind of humorous way."

George W. Bush had famously resisted the Correspondents' Dinner and suffered greatly at it, but he had prepped extensively, and every year he pulled out an acceptable performance. But neither woman, confiding their concerns around the small table in Conway's office to a journalist they regarded as sympathetic, thought Trump had a realistic chance of making the dinner anything like a success.

"He doesn't appreciate cruel humor," said Conway.

"His style is more old-fashioned," said Hicks.

Both women, clearly seeing the Correspondents' Dinner as an intractable problem, kept characterizing the event as "unfair," which, more generally, is how they characterized the media's view of Trump. "He's unfairly portrayed." "They don't give him the benefit of the doubt." "He's just not treated the way other presidents have been treated."

The burden here for Conway and Hicks was their understanding that the president did not see the media's lack of regard for him as part of a political divide on which he stood on a particular side. Instead, he perceived it as a deep personal attack on him: for entirely unfair reasons, ad hominem reasons, the media just did not like him. Ridiculed him. Cruelly. Why?

The journalist, trying to offer some comfort, told the two women there was a rumor going around that Graydon Carter—the editor of *Vanity Fair* and host of one of the most important parties of the Correspondents' Dinner weekend, and, for decades, one of Trump's key tormentors in the media—was shortly going to be pushed out of the magazine.

"Really?" said Hicks, jumping up. "Oh my God, can I tell him? Would that be okay? He'll want to know this." She headed quickly downstairs to the Oval Office.

* * *

Curiously, Conway and Hicks each portrayed a side of the president's alter ego media problem. Conway was the bitter antagonist, the mud-in-your-eye messenger who reliably sent the media into paroxysms of outrage against the president. Hicks was the confidante ever trying to get the president a break and some good ink in the only media he really cared about—the media that most hated him. But as different as they were in their media functions and temperament, both women had achieved remarkable influence in the administration by serving as the key lieutenants responsible for addressing the president's most pressing concern, his media reputation.

While Trump was in most ways a conventional misogynist, in the workplace he was much closer to women than to men. The former he confided in, the latter he held at arm's length. He liked and needed his office wives, and he trusted them with his most important personal issues. Women, according to Trump, were simply more loyal and trustworthy than men. Men might be more forceful and competent, but they were also more likely to have their own agendas. Women, by their nature, or Trump's version of their nature, were more likely to focus their purpose on a man. A man like Trump.

It wasn't happenstance or just casting balance that his *Apprentice* sidekick was a woman, nor that his daughter Ivanka had become one of his closest confidants. He felt women understood him. Or, the kind of women he liked—positive-outlook, can-do, loyal women, who also looked good—understood him. Everybody who successfully worked for him understood that there was always a subtext of his needs and personal tics that had to be scrupulously attended to; in this, he was not all that different from other highly successful figures, just more so. It would be hard to imagine someone who expected a greater awareness of and more catering to his peculiar whims, rhythms, prejudices, and often inchoate desires. He needed special—extra special—handling. Women, he explained to one friend with something like self-awareness, generally got this more precisely than men. In particular, women who self-selected themselves as tolerant of or oblivious to or amused by or steeled against his casual misogyny and constant sexual subtext—which was somehow, incongruously and often jarringly, matched with paternal regard—got this.

* * *

Kellyanne Conway first met Donald Trump at a meeting of the condo board for the Trump International Hotel, which was directly across the street from the UN and was where, in the early 2000s, she lived with her husband and children. Conway's husband, George, a graduate of Harvard College and Yale Law School, was a partner at the premier corporate mergers and acquisitions firm Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz. (Though Wachtell was a Democratic-leaning firm, George had played a behind-the-scenes role on the team that represented Paula Jones in her pursuit of Bill Clinton.) In its professional and domestic balance, the Conway family was organized around George's career. Kellyanne's career was a sidelight.

Kellyanne, who in the Trump campaign would use her working-class biography to good effect, grew up in central New Jersey, the daughter of a trucker, raised by a single mother (and, always in her narrative, her grandmother and two unmarried aunts). She went to George Washington law school and afterward interned for Reagan's pollster, Richard Wirthlin. Then she became the assistant to Frank Luntz, a curious figure in the Republican Party, known as much for his television deals and toupee as for his polling acumen. Conway herself began to make appearances on cable TV while working for Luntz.

One virtue of the research and polling business she started in 1995 was that it could adapt to her husband's career. But she never much rose above a midrank presence in Republican political circles, nor did she become more than the also-ran behind Ann Coulter and Laura Ingraham on cable television—which is where Trump first saw her and why he singled her out at the condo board meeting.

In a real sense, however, her advantage was not meeting Trump but being taken up by the Mercers. They recruited Conway in 2015 to work on the Cruz campaign, when Trump was still far from the conservative ideal, and then, in August 2016, inserted her into the Trump campaign.

She understood her role. “I will only ever call you Mr. Trump,” she told the candidate with perfect-pitch solemnity when he interviewed her for the job. It was a trope she would repeat in interview after interview—Conway was a catalog of learned lines—a message repeated as much for Trump as for others.

Her title was campaign manager, but that was a misnomer. Bannon was the real manager, and she was the senior pollster. But Bannon shortly replaced her in that role and she was left in what Trump saw as the vastly more important role of cable spokesperson.

Conway seemed to have a convenient On-Off toggle. In private, in the Off position, she seemed to regard Trump as a figure of exhausting exaggeration or even absurdity—or, at least, if you regarded him that way, she seemed to suggest that she might, too. She illustrated her opinion of her boss with a whole series of facial expressions: eyes rolling, mouth agape, head snapping back. But in the On position, she metamorphosed into believer, protector, defender, and handler. Conway is an antifeminist (or, actually, in a complicated ideological somersault, she sees feminists as being antifeminists), ascribing her methods and temperament to her being a wife and mother. She’s instinctive and reactive. Hence her role as the ultimate Trump defender: she verbally threw herself in front of any bullet coming his way.

Trump loved her defend-at-all-costs shtick. Conway’s appearances were on his schedule to watch live. His was often the first call she got after coming off the air. She channeled Trump: she said exactly the kind of Trump stuff that would otherwise make her put a finger-gun to her head.

After the election—Trump’s victory setting off a domestic reordering in the Conway household, and a scramble to get her husband an administration job—Trump assumed she would be his press secretary. “He and my mother,” Conway said, “because they both watch a lot of television, thought this was one of the most important jobs.” In Conway’s version, she turned Trump down or demurred. She kept proposing alternatives in which she would be the key spokesperson but would be more as well. In fact, almost everyone else was maneuvering Trump around his desire to appoint Conway.

Loyalty was Trump’s most valued attribute, and in Conway’s view her kamikaze-like media defense of the president had earned her a position of utmost primacy in the White House. But in her public persona, she had pushed the boundaries of loyalty too far; she was so hyperbolic that even Trump loyalists found her behavior extreme and were repelled. None were more put off than Jared and Ivanka, who, appalled at the shamelessness of her television appearances, extended this into a larger critique of Conway's vulgarity. When referring to her, they were particularly partial to using the shorthand "nails," a reference to her Cruella de Vil-length manicure treatments.

By mid-February she was already the subject of leaks—many coming from Jared and Ivanka—about how she had been sidelined. She vociferously defended herself, producing a list of television appearances still on her schedule, albeit lesser ones. But she also had a teary scene with Trump in the Oval Office, offering to resign if the president had lost faith in her. Almost invariably, when confronted with self-abnegation, Trump offered copious reassurances. "You will always have a place in my administration," he told her. "You will be here for eight years."

But she had indeed been sidelined, reduced to second-rate media, to being a designated emissary to right-wing groups, and left out of any meaningful decision making. This she blamed on the media, a scourge that further united her in self-pity with Donald Trump. In fact, her relationship with the president deepened as they bonded over their media wounds.

* * *

Hope Hicks, then age twenty-six, was the campaign's first hire. She knew the president vastly better than Conway did, and she understood that her most important media function was not to be in the media.

Hicks grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut. Her father was a PR executive who now worked for the Glover Park Group, the Democratic-leaning communications and political consulting firm; her mother was a former staffer for a democratic congressman. An indifferent student, Hicks went to Southern Methodist University and then did some modeling before getting a PR job. She first went to work for Matthew Hiltzik, who ran a small New York-based PR firm and was noted for his ability to work with high-maintenance clients, including the movie producer Harvey Weinstein (later pilloried for years of sexual harassment and abuse—accusations that Hiltzik and his staff had long helped protect him from) and the television personality Katie Couric. Hiltzik, an active Democrat who had worked for Hillary Clinton, also represented Ivanka Trump's fashion line; Hicks started to do some work for the account and then joined Ivanka's company full time. In 2015, Ivanka seconded her to her father's campaign; as the campaign progressed, moving from novelty project to political factor to juggernaut, Hicks's family increasingly, and incredulously, viewed her as rather having been taken captive. (Following the Trump victory and her move into the White House, her friends and intimates talked with great concern about what kind of therapies and recuperation she would need after her tenure was finally over.)

Over the eighteen months of the campaign, the traveling group usually consisted of the candidate, Hicks, and the campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski. In time, she became—in addition to an inadvertent participant in history, about which she was quite as astonished as anyone—a kind of Stepford factotum, as absolutely dedicated to and tolerant of Mr. Trump as anyone who had ever worked for him.

Shortly after Lewandowski, with whom Hicks had an on-and-off romantic relationship, was fired in June 2016 for clashing with Trump family members, Hicks sat in Trump Tower with Trump and his sons, worrying about Lewandowski's treatment in the press and wondering aloud how she might help him. Trump, who otherwise seemed to treat Hicks in a protective and even paternal way, looked up and said, "Why? You've already done enough for him. You're the best piece of tail he'll ever have," sending Hicks running from the room.

As new layers began to form around Trump, first as nominee and then as president-elect, Hicks continued playing the role of his personal PR woman. She would remain his constant shadow and the person with the best access to him. "Have you spoken to Hope?" were among the words most frequently uttered in the West Wing.

Hicks, sponsored by Ivanka and ever loyal to her, was in fact thought of as Trump's real daughter, while Ivanka was thought of as his real wife. More functionally, but as elementally, Hicks was the president's chief media handler. She worked by the president's side, wholly separate from the White House's forty-person-strong communications office. The president's personal message and image were entrusted to her—or, more accurately, she was the president's agent in retailing that message and image, which he trusted to no one but himself. Together they formed something of a freelance operation.

Without any particular politics of her own, and, with her New York PR background, quite looking down on the right-wing press, she was the president's official liaison to the mainstream media. The president had charged her with the ultimate job: a good write-up in the *New York Times*.

That, in the president's estimation, had yet failed to happen, "but Hope tries and tries," the president said.

On more than one occasion, after a day—one of the countless days—of particularly bad notices, the president greeted her, affectionately, with "You must be the world's worst PR person."

* * *

In the early days of the transition, with Conway out of the running for the press secretary job, Trump became determined to find a "star." The conservative radio host Laura Ingraham, who had spoken at the convention, was on the list, as was Ann Coulter. Fox Business's Maria Bartiromo was also under consideration. (This was television, the president-elect said, and it ought to be a good-looking woman.) When none of those ideas panned out, the job was offered to Fox News's Tucker Carlson, who turned it down.

But there was a counterview: the press secretary ought to be the opposite of a star. In fact, the entire press operation ought to be downgraded. If the press was the enemy, why pander to it, why give it more visibility? This was fundamental Bannonism: stop thinking you can somehow get along with your enemies.

As the debate went on, Priebus pushed for one of his deputies at the Republican National Committee, Sean Spicer, a well-liked forty-five-year-old Washington political professional with a string of posts on the Hill in the George W. Bush years as well as with the RNC. Spicer, hesitant to take the job, kept anxiously posing the question to colleagues in the Washington swamp: "If I do this, will I ever be able to work again?"

There were conflicting answers.

During the transition, many members of Trump's team came to agree with Bannon that their approach to White House press management ought to be to push it off—and the longer the arm's length the better. For the press, this initiative, or rumors of it, became another sign of the incoming administration's antipress stance and its systematic efforts to cut off the information supply. In truth, the suggestions about moving the briefing room away from the White House, or curtailing the briefing schedule, or limiting broadcast windows or press pool access, were variously discussed by other incoming administrations. In her husband's White House, Hillary Clinton had been a proponent of limiting press access.

It was Donald Trump who was not able to relinquish this proximity to the press and the stage in his own house. He regularly berated Spicer for his ham-handed performances, often giving his full attention to them. His response to Spicer's briefings was part of his continuing belief that nobody could work the media like he could, that somehow he had been stuck with an F-Troop communications team that was absent charisma, magnetism, and proper media connections.

Trump's pressure on Spicer—a constant stream of directorial castigation and instruction that reliably rattled the press secretary—helped turn the briefings into a can't-miss train wreck. Meanwhile, the real press operation had more or less devolved into a set of competing press organizations within the White House.

There was Hope Hicks and the president, living in what other West Wingers characterized as an alternative universe in which the mainstream media would yet discover the charm and wisdom of Donald Trump. Where past presidents might have spent portions of their day talking about the needs, desires, and points of leverage among various members of Congress, the president and Hicks spent a great deal of time talking about a fixed cast of media personalities, trying to second-guess the real agendas and weak spots among cable anchors and producers and *Times* and *Post* reporters.

Often the focus of this otherworldly ambition was directed at *Times* reporter Maggie Haberman. Haberman's front-page beat at the paper, which might be called the "weirdness of Donald Trump" beat, involved producing vivid tales of eccentricities, questionable behavior, and shit the president says, told in a knowing, deadpan style. Beyond acknowledging that Trump was a boy from Queens yet in awe of the *Times*, nobody in the West Wing could explain why he and Hicks would so often turn to Haberman for what would so reliably be a mocking and hurtful portrayal. There was some feeling that Trump was returning to scenes of past success: the *Times* might be against him, but Haberman had worked at the *New York Post* for many years. "She's very professional," Conway said, speaking in defense of the president and trying to justify Haberman's extraordinary access. But however intent he remained on getting good ink in the *Times*, the president saw Haberman as "mean and horrible." And yet, on a near-weekly basis, he and Hicks plotted when next to have the *Times* come in.

* * *

Kushner had his personal press operation and Bannon had his. The leaking culture had become so open and overt—most of the time everybody could identify everybody else's leaks—that it was now formally staffed.

Kushner's Office of American Innovation employed, as its spokesperson, Josh Raffel, who, like Hicks, came out of Matthew Hiltzik's PR shop. Raffel, a Democrat who had been working in Hollywood, acted as Kushner and his wife's personal rep—not least of all because the couple felt that Spicer, owing his allegiance to Priebus, was not aggressively representing them. This was explicit. "Josh is Jared's Hope," was his internal West Wing job description.

Raffel coordinated all of Kushner and Ivanka's personal press, though there was more of this for Ivanka than for Kushner. But, more importantly, Raffel coordinated all of Kushner's substantial leaking, or, as it were, his off-the-record briefings and guidance—no small part of it against Bannon. Kushner, who with great conviction asserted that he never leaked, in part justified his press operation as a defense against Bannon's press operation.

Bannon's "person," Alexandra Preate—a witty conservative socialite partial to champagne—had previously represented Breitbart News and other conservative figures like CNBC's Larry Kudlow, and was close friends with Rebekah Mercer. In a relationship that nobody seemed quite able to explain, she handled all of Bannon's press "outreach" but was not employed by the White House, although she maintained an office, or at least an officelike presence, there. The point was clear: her client was Bannon and not the Trump administration.

Bannon, to Jared and Ivanka's continued alarm, had unique access to Breitbart's significant abilities to change the right-wing mood and focus. Bannon insisted he had cut his ties to his former colleagues at Breitbart, but that strained everybody's credulity—and everybody figured nobody was supposed to believe it. Rather, everybody was supposed to fear it.

There was, curiously, general agreement in the West Wing that Donald Trump, the media president, had one of the most dysfunctional communication operations in modern White House history. Mike Dubke, a Republican PR operative who was hired as White House communications director, was, by all estimations, from the first day on his way out the door. In the end he lasted only three months.

* * *

The White House Correspondents' Dinner rose, as much as any other challenge for the new president and his team, as a test of his abilities. He wanted to do it. He was certain that the power of his charm was greater than the rancor that he bore this audience—or that they bore him.

He recalled his 2015 *Saturday Night Live* appearance—which, in his view, was entirely successful. In fact, he had refused to prepare, had kept saying he would "improvise," no problem. Comedians don't actually improvise, he was told; it's all scripted and rehearsed. But this counsel had only marginal effect.

Almost nobody except the president himself thought he could pull off the Correspondents' Dinner. His staff was terrified that he would die up there in front of a seething and contemptuous audience. Though he could dish it out, often very harshly, no one thought he could take it. Still, the president seemed eager to appear at the event, if casual about it, too—with Hicks, ordinarily encouraging his every impulse, trying not to.

Bannon pressed the symbolic point: the president should not be seen currying the favor of his enemies, or trying to entertain them. The media was a much better whipping boy than it was a partner in crime. The Bannon principle, the steel stake in the ground, remained: don't bend, don't accommodate, don't meet halfway. And in the end, rather than implying that Trump did not have the talent and wit to move this crowd, that was a much better way to persuade the president that he should not appear at the dinner.

When Trump finally agreed to forgo the event, Conway, Hicks, and virtually everybody else in the West Wing breathed a lot easier.

* * *

Shortly after five o'clock on the one hundredth day of his presidency—a particularly muggy one—while twenty-five hundred or so members of news organizations and their friends gathered at the Washington Hilton for the White House Correspondents' Dinner, the president left the West Wing for Marine One, which was soon en route to Andrews Air Force Base. Accompanying him were Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, Reince Priebus, Hope Hicks, and Kellyanne Conway. Vice President Pence and his wife joined the group at Andrews for the brief flight on Air Force One to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where the president would give a speech. During the flight, crab cakes were served, and *Face the Nation*'s John Dickerson was granted a special hundredth-day interview.

The first Harrisburg event was held at a factory that manufactured landscaping and gardening tools, where the president closely inspected a line of colorful wheelbarrows. The next event, where the speech would be delivered, was at a rodeo arena in the Farm Show Complex and Expo Center.

And that was the point of this little trip. It had been designed both to remind the rest of the country that the president was not just another phony baloney in a tux like those at the White House Correspondents' Dinner (this somehow presupposed that the president's base cared about or was even aware of the event) and to keep the president's mind off the fact that he was missing the dinner.

But the president kept asking for updates on the jokes.

16

COMEY

"It's impossible to make him understand you can't stop these investigations," said Roger Ailes in early May, a frustrated voice in the Trump kitchen cabinet. "In the old days, you could say leave it alone. Now you say leave it alone and you're the one who gets investigated. He can't get this through his head."

In fact, as various members of the billionaires' cabinet tried to calm down the president during their evening phone calls, they were largely egging him on by expressing deep concern about his DOJ and FBI peril. Many of Trump's wealthy friends saw themselves as having particular DOJ expertise. In their own careers, they had had enough issues with the Justice Department to prompt them to develop DOJ relationships and sources, and now they were always up on DOJ gossip. Flynn was going to throw him in the soup. Manafort was going to roll. And it wasn't just Russia. It was Atlantic City. And Mar-a-Lago. And Trump SoHo.

Both Chris Christie and Rudy Giuliani—each a self-styled expert on the DOJ and the FBI, and ever assuring Trump of their inside sources—encouraged him to take the view that the DOJ was resolved against him; it was all part of a holdover Obama plot.

Even more urgent was Charlie Kushner's fear, channeled through his son and daughter-in-law, that the Kushner family's dealings were getting wrapped up in the pursuit of Trump. Leaks in January had put the kibosh on the Kushners' deal with the Chinese financial colossus Anbang Insurance Group to refinance the family's large debt in one of its major real estate holdings, 666 Fifth Avenue. At the end of April, the *New York Times*, supplied with leaks from the DOJ, linked the Kushner business in a front-page article to Beny Steinmetz—an Israeli diamond, mining, and real estate billionaire with Russian ties who was under chronic investigation around the world. (The Kushner position was not helped by the fact that the president had been gleefully telling multiple people that Jared could solve the Middle East problem because the Kushners knew all the best people in Israel.) During the first week of May, the *Times* and the *Washington Post* covered the Kushner family's supposed efforts to attract Chinese investors with the promise of U.S. visas.

“The kids”—Jared and Ivanka—exhibited an increasingly panicked sense that the FBI and DOJ were moving beyond Russian election interference and into finances. “Ivanka is terrified,” said a satisfied Bannon.

Trump turned to suggesting to his billionaire chorus that he fire FBI director Comey. He had raised this idea many times before, but always, seemingly, at the same time and in the same context that he brought up the possibility of firing everybody. *Should I fire Bannon? Should I fire Reince? Should I fire McMaster? Should I fire Spicer? Should I fire Tillerson?* This ritual was, everyone understood, more a pretext to a discussion of the power he held than it was, strictly, about personnel decisions. Still, in Trump’s poison-the-well fashion, the should-I-fire-so-and-so question, and any consideration of it by any of the billionaires, was translated into agreement, as in: *Carl Icahn thinks I should fire Comey (or Bannon, or Priebus, or McMaster, or Tillerson).*

His daughter and son-in-law, their urgency compounded by Charlie Kushner’s concern, encouraged him, arguing that the once possibly charmable Comey was now a dangerous and uncontrollable player whose profit would inevitably be their loss. When Trump got wound up about something, Bannon noted, someone was usually winding him up. The family focus of discussion—insistent, almost frenzied—became wholly about Comey’s ambition. He would rise by damaging them. And the drumbeat grew.

“That son of a bitch is going to try to fire the head of the FBI,” said Ailes.

During the first week of May, the president had a ranting meeting with Sessions and his deputy Rod Rosenstein. It was a humiliating meeting for both men, with Trump insisting they couldn’t control their own people and pushing them to find a reason to fire Comey—in effect, he blamed them for not having come up with that reason months ago. (It was their fault, he implied, that Comey hadn’t been fired right off the bat.)

Also that week, there was a meeting that included the president, Jared and Ivanka, Bannon, Priebus, and White House counsel Don McGahn. It was a closed-door meeting—widely noted because it was unusual for the Oval Office door ever to be closed.

All the Democrats hate Comey, said the president, expressing his certain and self-justifying view. *All the FBI agents hate him, too—75 percent of them can’t stand him.* (This was a number that Kushner had somehow alighted on, and Trump had taken it up.) *Firing Comey will be a huge fundraising advantage*, declared the president, a man who almost never talked about fundraising.

McGahn tried to explain that in fact Comey himself was not running the Russia investigation, that without Comey the investigation would proceed anyway. McGahn, the lawyer whose job was necessarily to issue cautions, was a frequent target of Trump rages. Typically these would begin as a kind of exaggeration or acting and then devolve into the real thing: uncontrollable, vein-popping, ugly-face, tantrum stuff. It got primal. Now the president’s denunciations focused in a vicious fury on McGahn and his cautions about

Comey.

"Comey was a rat," repeated Trump. There were rats everywhere and you had to get rid of them. *John Dean, John Dean*, he repeated. "Do you know what John Dean did to Nixon?"

Trump, who saw history through personalities—people he might have liked or disliked—was a John Dean freak. He went bananas when a now gray and much aged Dean appeared on talk shows to compare the Trump-Russia investigation to Watergate. That would bring the president to instant attention and launch an inevitable talk-back monologue to the screen about loyalty and what people would do for media attention. It might also be accompanied by several revisionist theories Trump had about Watergate and how Nixon had been framed. And always there were rats. A rat was someone who would take you down for his own advantage. If you had a rat, you needed to kill it. And there were rats all around.

(Later, it was Bannon who had to take the president aside and tell him that John Dean had been the White House counsel in the Nixon administration, so maybe it would be a good idea to lighten up on McGahn.)

As the meeting went on, Bannon, from the doghouse and now, in their mutual antipathy to Jarvanka, allied with Priebus, seized the opportunity to make an impassioned case opposing any move against Comey—which was also, as much, an effort to make the case against Jared and Ivanka and their allies, "the geniuses." ("The geniuses" was one of Trump's terms of derision for anybody who might annoy him or think they were smarter than him, and Bannon now appropriated the term and applied it to Trump's family.) Offering forceful and dire warnings, Bannon told the president: "This Russian story is a third-tier story, but you fire Comey and it'll be the biggest story in the world."

By the time the meeting ended, Bannon and Priebus believed they had prevailed. But that weekend, at Bedminster, the president, again listening to the deep dismay of his daughter and son-in-law, built up another head of steam. With Jared and Ivanka, Stephen Miller was also along for the weekend. The weather was bad and the president missed his golf game, dwelling, with Jared, on his Comey fury. It was Jared, in the version told by those outside the Jarvanka circle, that pushed for action, once more winding up his father-in-law. With the president's assent, Kushner, in this version, gave Miller notes on why the FBI director should be fired and asked him to draft a letter that could set out the basis for immediate dismissal. Miller—less than a deft drafting hand—recruited Hicks to help, another person without clearly relevant abilities. (Miller would later be admonished by Bannon for letting himself get tied up, and potentially implicated, in the Comey mess.)

The letter, in the panicky draft assembled by Miller and Hicks, either from Kushner's directions or on instructions directly coming from the president, was an off-the-wall mishmash containing the talking points—Comey's handling of the Hillary Clinton investigation; the assertion (from Kushner) that the FBI itself had turned against Comey; and, the president's key obsession, the fact that Comey wouldn't publicly acknowledge that the president wasn't under investigation—that would form the Trump family's case for firing Comey. That is, everything but the fact that Comey's FBI was investigating the president.

The Kushner side, for its part, bitterly fought back against any characterization of Kushner as the prime mover or mastermind, in effect putting the entire Bedminster letter effort—as well as the determination to get rid of Comey—entirely on the president's head and casting Kushner as passive bystander. (The Kushner side's position was articulated as follows: "Did he [Kushner] support the decision? Yes. Was he told this was happening? Yes. Did he encourage it? No. Was he fighting for it [Comey's ouster] for weeks and months? No. Did he fight [the ouster]? No. Did he say it would go badly? No.")

Horrified, McGahn quashed sending it. Nevertheless, it was passed to Sessions and Rosenstein, who quickly began drafting their own version of what Kushner and the president obviously wanted.

"I knew when he got back he might blow at any moment," said Bannon after the president returned from his Bedminster weekend.

* * *

On Monday morning, May 8, in a meeting in the Oval Office, the president told Priebus and Bannon that he had made his decision: he would fire Director Comey. Both men again made heated pleas against the move, arguing for, at the very least, more discussion. Here was a key technique for managing the president: delay. Rolling something forward likely meant that something else—an equal or greater fiasco—would come along to preempt whatever fiasco was currently at hand. What's more, delay worked advantageously with Trump's attention span; whatever the issue of the moment, he would shortly be on to something else. When the meeting ended, Priebus and Bannon thought they had bought some breathing room.

Later that day, Sally Yates and former director of National Intelligence James Clapper appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Crime and Terrorism subcommittee—and were greeted by a series of furious tweets from the president.

Here was, Bannon saw again, the essential Trump problem. He hopelessly personalized everything. He saw the world in commercial and show business terms: someone else was always trying to one-up you, someone else was always trying to take the limelight. The battle was between you and someone else who wanted what you had. For Bannon, reducing the political world to face-offs and spats belittled the place in history Trump and his administration had achieved. But it also belied the real powers they were up against. Not people—institutions.

To Trump, he was just up against Sally Yates, who was, he steamed, "such a cunt."

Since her firing on January 30, Yates had remained suspiciously quiet. When journalists approached her, she, or her intermediaries, explained that per her lawyers she was shut down on all media. The president believed she was merely lying in wait. In phone calls to friends, he worried about her "plan" and "strategy," and he continued to press his after-dinner sources for what they thought she and Ben Rhodes, Trump's favorite Obama plotter, had "up their sleeves."

For each of his enemies—and, actually, for each of his friends—the issue for him came down, in many ways, to their personal press plan. The media was the battlefield. Trump assumed everybody wanted his or her fifteen minutes and that everybody had a press strategy for when they got them. If you couldn't get press directly for yourself, you became a leaker. There was no happenstance news, in Trump's view. All news was manipulated and designed, planned and planted. All news was to some extent fake—he understood that very well, because he himself had faked it so many times in his career. This was why he had so naturally cottoned to the "fake news" label. "I've made stuff up forever, and they always print it," he bragged.

The return of Sally Yates, with her appointment before the Senate Judiciary Committee, marked the beginning, Trump believed, of a sustained and well-organized media rollout for her. (His press view was confirmed later in May by a lavish, hagiographic profile of Yates in the *New Yorker*. "How long do you think she was planning this?" he asked, rhetorically. "You know she was. It's her payday.") "Yates is only famous because of me," the president complained bitterly. "Otherwise, who is she? Nobody."

In front of Congress that Monday morning, Yates delivered a cinematic performance—cool, temperate, detailed, selfless—compounding Trump's fury and agitation.

* * *

On the morning of Tuesday, May 9, with the president still fixated on Comey, and with Kushner and his daughter behind him, Priebus again moved to delay: "There's a right way to do this and a wrong way to do this," he told the president. "We don't want him learning about this on television. I'm going to say this one last time: this is not the right way to do this. If you want to do this, the right way is to have him in and have a conversation. This is the decent way and the professional way." Once more, the president seemed to calm down and become more focused on the necessary process.

But that was a false flag. In fact, the president, in order to avoid embracing conventional process—or, for that matter, any real sense of cause and effect—merely eliminated everybody else from *his* process. For most of the day, almost no one would know that he had decided to take matters into his own hands. In presidential annals, the firing of FBI director James Comey may be the most consequential move ever made by a modern president acting entirely on his own.

As it happened, the Justice Department—Attorney General Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein—were, independent of the president's own course, preparing their case against Comey. They would take the Bedminster line and blame Comey for errors of his handling of the Clinton email mess—a problematic charge, because if that was truly the issue, why wasn't Comey dismissed on that basis as soon as the Trump administration took office? But in fact, quite regardless of the Sessions and Rosenstein case, the president had determined to act on his own.

Jared and Ivanka were urging the president on, but even they did not know that the axe would shortly fall. Hope Hicks, Trump's steadfast shadow, who otherwise knew everything the president thought—not least because he was helpless not to express it out loud—didn't know. Steve Bannon, however much he worried that the president might blow, didn't know. His chief of staff didn't know. And his press secretary didn't know. The president, on the verge of starting a war with the FBI, the DOJ, and many in Congress, was going rogue.

At some point that afternoon Trump told his daughter and son-in-law about his plan. They immediately became coconspirators and firmly shut out any competing advice.

Eerily, it was a notably on-time and unruffled day in the West Wing. Mark Halperin, the political reporter and campaign chronicler, was waiting in the reception area for Hope Hicks, who fetched him a bit before 5:00 p.m. Fox's Howard Kurtz was there, too, waiting for his appointment with Sean Spicer. And Reince Priebus's assistant had just been out to tell his five o'clock appointment it would be only a few more minutes.

Just before five, in fact, the president, having not too long before notified McGahn of his intention, pulled the trigger. Trump's personal security guard, Keith Schiller, delivered the termination letter to Comey's office at the FBI just after five o'clock. The letter's second sentence included the words "You are hereby terminated and removed from office, effective immediately."

Shortly thereafter, most of the West Wing staff, courtesy of an erroneous report from Fox News, was for a brief moment under the impression that Comey had resigned. Then, in a series of information synapses throughout the offices of the West Wing, it became clear what had actually happened.

"So next it's a special prosecutor!" said Priebus in disbelief, to no one in particular, when he learned shortly before five o'clock what was happening.

Spicer, who would later be blamed for not figuring out how to positively spin the Comey firing, had only minutes to process it.

Not only had the decision been made by the president with almost no consultation except that of his inner family circle, but the response, and explanation, and even legal justifications, were also almost exclusively managed by him and his family. Rosenstein and Sessions's parallel rationale for the firing was shoehorned in at the last minute, at which point, at Kushner's direction, the initial explanation of Comey's firing became that the president had acted solely on their recommendation. Spicer was forced to deliver this unlikely rationale, as was the vice president. But this pretense unraveled almost immediately, not least because most everyone in the West Wing, wanting nothing to do with the decision to fire Comey, was helping to unravel it.

The president, along with his family, stood on one side of the White House divide, while the staff—mouths agape, disbelieving and speechless—stood on the other.

But the president seemed also to want it known that he, aroused and dangerous, personally took down Comey. Forget Rosenstein and Sessions, it *was* personal. It was a powerful president and a vengeful one, in every way galled and affronted by those in pursuit of him, and determined to protect his family, who were in turn determined to have him protect them.

"The daughter will take down the father," said Bannon, in a Shakespearian mood.

Within the West Wing there was much replaying of alternative scenarios. If you wanted to get rid of Comey, there were surely politic ways of doing it—which had in fact been suggested to Trump. (A curious one—an idea that later would seem ironic—was to get rid of General Kelly at Homeland Security and move Comey into that job.) But the point really was that Trump had wanted to confront and humiliate the FBI director. Cruelty was a Trump attribute.

The firing had been carried out publicly and in front of his family—catching Comey entirely off guard as he gave a speech in California. Then the president had further personalized the blow with an ad hominem attack on the director, suggesting that the FBI itself was on Trump's side and that it, too, had only contempt for Comey.

The next day, as though to further emphasize and delight in both the insult and his personal impunity, the president met with Russian bigwigs in the Oval Office, including Russia's Ambassador Kislyak, the very focus of much of the Trump-Russia investigation. To the Russians he said: "I just fired the head of the FBI. He was crazy, a real nut job. I faced great pressure because of Russia. That's taken off." Then, to boot, he revealed information supplied to the United States by Israel from its agent in place in Syria about ISIS using laptops to smuggle bombs onto airlines—revealing enough information to compromise the Israeli agent. (This incident did not help Trump's reputation in intelligence circles, since, in spycraft, human sources are to be protected above all other secrets.)

"It's Trump," said Bannon. "He thinks he can fire the FBI."

* * *

Trump believed that firing Comey would make him a hero. Over the next forty-eight hours he spun his side to various friends. It was simple: he had stood up to the FBI. He proved that he was willing to take on the state power. The outsider against the insiders. After all, that's why he was elected.

At some level he had a point. One reason presidents don't fire the director of the FBI is that they fear the consequences. It's the Hoover syndrome: any president can be hostage to what the FBI knows, and a president who treats the FBI with something less than deference does so at his own peril. But this president had stood up to the feds. One man against the unaccountable power that the left had long railed against—and that more recently the right had taken as a Holy Grail issue, too. "Everybody should be rooting for me," the president said to friends, more and more plaintively.

Here was another peculiar Trump attribute: an inability to see his actions the way most others saw them. Or to fully appreciate how people expected him to behave. The notion of the presidency as an institutional and political concept, with an emphasis on ritual and propriety and semiotic messaging—statesmanship—was quite beyond him.

Inside the government, the response to Comey's firing was a kind of bureaucratic revulsion. Bannon had tried to explain to Trump the essential nature of career government officials, people whose comfort zone was in their association with hegemonic organizations and a sense of a higher cause—they were different, very different, from those who sought individual distinction. Whatever else Comey might be, he was first and foremost a bureaucrat. Casting him ignominiously out was yet another Trump insult to the bureaucracy.

Rod Rosenstein, the author of the letter that ostensibly provided the justification for firing Comey, now stood in the line of fire. The fifty-two-year-old Rosenstein, who, in rimless glasses, seemed to style himself as a bureaucrat's bureaucrat, was the longest-serving U.S. attorney in the country. He lived within the system, all by the book, his highest goal seeming to be to have people say he did things by the book. He was a straight shooter—and he wanted everyone to know it.

All this was undermined by Trump—trashed, even. The brow-beating and snarling president had hectored the country's two top law enforcement officials into an ill-considered or, at the very least, an ill-timed indictment of the director of the FBI. Rosenstein was already feeling used and abused. And then he was shown to have been tricked, too. He was a dupe.

The president had forced Rosenstein and Sessions to construct a legal rationale, yet then he could not even maintain the bureaucratic pretense of following it. Having enlisted Rosenstein and Sessions in his plot, Trump now exposed their efforts to present a reasonable and aboveboard case as a sham—and, arguably, a plan to obstruct justice. The president made it perfectly clear that he hadn't fired the director of the FBI because he did Hillary wrong; he fired Comey because the FBI was too aggressively investigating him and his administration.

Hyper-by-the-book Rod Rosenstein—heretofore the quintessential apolitical player—immediately became, in Washington eyes, a hopeless Trump tool. But Rosenstein's revenge was deft, swift, overwhelming, and (of course) by the book.

Given the decision of the attorney general to recuse himself from the Russia investigation, it fell under the authority of the deputy attorney general to determine whether a conflict existed—that is, whether the deputy attorney general, because of self-interest, might not be able to act objectively—and if, in his sole discretion, he judged a conflict to exist, to appoint an outside special counsel with wide powers and responsibilities to conduct an investigation and, potentially, a prosecution.

On May 17, twelve days after FBI director Comey was fired, without consulting the White House or the attorney general, Rosenstein appointed former FBI director Robert Mueller to oversee the investigation of Trump's, his campaign's, and his staff's ties to Russia. If Michael Flynn had recently become the most powerful man in Washington for what he might reveal about the president, now Mueller arguably assumed that position because he had the power to make Flynn, and all other assorted Trump cronies and flunkies, squeal.

Rosenstein, of course, perhaps with some satisfaction, understood that he had delivered what could be a mortal blow to the Trump presidency.

Bannon, shaking his head in wonder about Trump, commented drily: "He doesn't necessarily see what's coming."

17

ABROAD AND AT HOME

On May 12, Roger Ailes was scheduled to return to New York from Palm Beach to meet with Peter Thiel, an early and lonely Trump supporter in Silicon Valley who had become increasingly astonished by Trump's unpredictability. Ailes and Thiel, both worried that Trump could bring Trumpism down, were set to discuss the funding and launch of a new cable news network. Thiel would pay for it and Ailes would bring O'Reilly, Hannity, himself, and maybe Bannon to it.

But two days before the meeting, Ailes fell in his bathroom and hit his head. Before slipping into a coma, he told his wife not to reschedule the meeting with Thiel. A week later, Ailes, that singular figure in the march from Nixon's silent majority to Reagan's Democrats to Trump's passionate base, was dead.

His funeral in Palm Beach on May 20 was quite a study in the currents of right-wing ambivalence and even mortification. Right-wing professionals remained passionate in their outward defense of Trump but were rattled, if not abashed, among one another. At the funeral, Rush Limbaugh and Laura Ingraham struggled to parse support for Trumpism even as they distanced themselves from Trump himself.

The president had surely become the right wing's meal ticket. He was the ultimate antiliberal: an authoritarian who was the living embodiment of resistance to authority. He was the exuberant inverse of everything the right wing found patronizing and gullible and sanctimonious about the left. And yet, obviously, Trump was Trump—careless, capricious, disloyal, far beyond any sort of control. Nobody knew that as well as the people who knew him best.

Ailes's wife, Beth, had militantly invited only Ailes loyalists to the funeral. Anyone who had wavered in her husband's defense since his firing or had decided that a better future lay with the Murdoch family was excluded. This put Trump, still enthralled by his new standing with Murdoch, on the other side of the line. Hours and then days—carefully tracked by Beth Ailes—ticked off without a condolence call from the president.

The morning of the funeral, Sean Hannity's private plane took off for Palm Beach from

Republic Airport in Farmingdale, Long Island. Accompanying Hannity was a small group of current and former Fox employees, all Ailes and Trump partisans. But each felt some open angst, or even incredulity, about Trump being Trump: first there was the difficulty of grasping the Comey rationale, and now his failure to give even a nod to his late friend Ailes.

"He's an idiot, obviously," said the former Fox correspondent Liz Trotta.

Fox anchor Kimberly Guilfoyle spent much of the flight debating Trump's entreaties to have her replace Sean Spicer at the White House. "There are a lot of issues, including personal survival."

As for Hannity himself, his view of the right-wing world was shifting from Foxcentric to Trumpcentric. He did not think much more than a year would pass before he, too, would be pushed from the network, or find it too inhospitable to stay on. And yet he was pained by Trump's slavish attentions to Murdoch, who had not only ousted Ailes but whose conservatism was at best utilitarian. "He was for Hillary!" said Hannity.

Ruminating out loud, Hannity said he would leave the network and go work full time for Trump, because nothing was more important than that Trump succeed—"in spite of himself," Hannity added, laughing.

But he was pissed off that Trump hadn't called Beth. "Mueller," he concluded, drawing deeply on an electronic cigarette, had distracted him.

Trump may be a Frankenstein creation, but he was the right wing's creation, the first, true, right-wing original. Hannity could look past the Comey disaster. And Jared. And the mess in the White House.

Still, he hadn't called Beth.

"What the fuck is wrong with him?" asked Hannity.

* * *

Trump believed he was one win away from turning everything around. Or, perhaps more to the point, one win away from good press that would turn everything around. The fact that he had largely squandered his first hundred days—whose victories should have been the currency of the next hundred days—was immaterial. You could be down in the media one day and then the next have a hit that made you a success.

"Big things, we need big things," he said, angrily and often. "This isn't big. I need big. Bring me big. Do you even know what big is?"

Repeal and replace, infrastructure, true tax reform—the rollout Trump had promised and then depended on Paul Ryan to deliver—was effectively in tatters. Every senior staff member was now maintaining that they shouldn't have done health care, the precursor to the legislative rollout, in the first place. Whose idea was that, anyway?

The natural default might be to do smaller things, incremental versions of the program. But Trump showed little interest in the small stuff. He became listless and irritable.

So, okay, it would have to be peace in the Middle East.

For Trump, as for many showmen or press release entrepreneurs, the enemy of everything is complexity and red tape, and the solution for everything is cutting corners. Bypass or ignore the difficulties; just move in a straight line to the vision, which, if it's bold enough, or grandiose enough, will sell itself. In this formula, there is always a series of middlemen who will promise to help you cut the corners, as well as partners who will be happy to piggyback on your grandiosity.

Enter the Crown Prince of the House of Saud, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, age thirty-one. Aka MBS.

The fortuitous circumstance was that the king of Saudi Arabia, MBS's father, was losing it. The consensus in the Saudi royal family about a need to modernize was growing stronger (somewhat). MBS—an inveterate player of video games—was a new sort of personality in the Saudi leadership. He was voluble, open, and expansive, a charmer and an international player, a canny salesman rather than a remote, taciturn grandee. He had seized the economic portfolio and was pursuing a vision—quite a Trumpian vision—to out-Dubai Dubai and diversify the economy. His would be a new, modern—well, a bit more modern—kingdom (yes, women would soon be allowed to drive—so thank God self-driving cars were coming!). Saudi leadership was marked by age, traditionalism, relative anonymity, and careful consensus thinking. The Saudi royal family, on the other hand, whence the leadership class comes, was often marked by excess, flash, and the partaking of the joys of modernity in foreign ports. MBS, a man in a hurry, was trying to bridge the Saudi royal selves.

Global liberal leadership had been all but paralyzed by the election of Donald Trump—indeed, by the very *existence* of Donald Trump. But it was an inverted universe in the Middle East. The Obama truculence and hyperrationalization and micromanaging, preceded by the Bush moral militarism and ensuing disruptions, preceded by Clinton deal making, quid pro quo, and backstabbing, had opened the way for Trump's version of realpolitik. He had no patience with the our-hands-are-tied ennui of the post-cold war order, that sense of the chess board locked in place, of incremental movement being the best-case scenario—the alternative being only war. His was a much simpler view: Who's got the power? Give me his number.

And, just as basically: The enemy of my enemy is my friend. If Trump had one fixed point of reference in the Middle East, it was—mostly courtesy of Michael Flynn's tutoring—that Iran was the bad guy. Hence everybody opposed to Iran was a pretty good guy.

After the election, MBS had reached out to Kushner. In the confusion of the Trump transition, nobody with foreign policy stature and an international network had been put in place—even the new secretary of state designate, Rex Tillerson, had no real experience in foreign policy. To bewildered foreign secretaries, it seemed logical to see the presidentelect's son-in-law as a figure of stability. Whatever happened, he would be there. And for certain regimes, especially the familycentric Saudis, Kushner, the son-in-law, was much more reassuring than a policy person. He wasn't in his job because of his ideas.

Of the many Trump gashes in modern major-power governing, you could certainly drive a Trojan horse through his lack of foreign policy particulars and relationships. This presented a do-over opportunity for the world in its relationship with the United States—or it did if you were willing to speak the new Trump language, whatever that was. There wasn't much of a road map here, just pure opportunism, a new transactional openness. Or, even more, a chance to use the powers of charm and seduction to which Trump responded as enthusiastically as he did to offers of advantageous new deals.

It was Kissingeresque realpolitik. Kissinger himself, long familiar with Trump by way of the New York social world and now taking Kushner under his wing, was successfully reinserting himself, helping to organize meetings with the Chinese and the Russians.

Most of America's usual partners, and even many antagonists, were unsettled if not horrified. Still, some saw opportunity. The Russians could see a free pass on the Ukraine and Georgia, as well as a lifting of sanctions, in return for giving up on Iran and Syria. Early in the transition, a high-ranking official in the Turkish government reached out in genuine confusion to a prominent U.S. business figure to inquire whether Turkey would have better leverage by putting pressure on the U.S. military presence in Turkey or by offering the new president an enviable hotel site on the Bosporus.

There was something curiously aligned between the Trump family and MBS. Like the entire Saudi leadership, MBS had, practically speaking, no education outside of Saudi Arabia. In the past, this had worked to limit the Saudi options—nobody was equipped to confidently explore new intellectual possibilities. As a consequence, everybody was wary of trying to get them to imagine change. But MBS and Trump were on pretty much equal footing. Knowing little made them oddly comfortable with each other. When MBS offered himself to Kushner as his guy in the Saudi kingdom, that was "like meeting someone nice at your first day of boarding school," said Kushner's friend.

Casting aside, in very quick order, previously held assumptions—in fact, not really aware of those assumptions—the new Trump thinking about the Middle East became the following: There are basically four players (or at least we can forget everybody else)—Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. The first three can be united against the fourth. And Egypt and Saudi Arabia, given what they want with respect to Iran—and anything else that does not interfere with the United States' interests—will pressure the Palestinians to make a deal. Voilà.

This represented a queasy-making mishmash of thought. Bannon's isolationism (a pox on all your houses—and keep us out of it); Flynn's anti-Iranism (of all the world's perfidy and toxicity, there is none like that of the mullahs); and Kushner's Kissingerism (not so much Kissingerism as, having no point of view himself, a dutiful attempt to follow the ninety-four-year-old's advice).

But the fundamental point was that the last three administrations had gotten the Middle East wrong. It was impossible to overstate how much contempt the Trump people felt for the business-as-usual thinking that had gotten it so wrong. Hence, the new operating principle was simple: do the opposite of what they (Obama, but the Bush neocons, too) would do. Their behavior, their conceits, their ideas—in some sense even their backgrounds, education, and class—were all suspect. And, what's more, you don't really have to know all that much yourself; you just do it differently than it was done before.

The old foreign policy was based on the idea of nuance: facing an infinitely complex multilateral algebra of threats, interests, incentives, deals, and ever evolving relationships, we strain to reach a balanced future. In practice, the new foreign policy, an effective Trump doctrine, was to reduce the board to three elements: powers we can work with, powers we cannot work with, and those without enough power whom we can functionally disregard or sacrifice. It was cold war stuff. And, indeed, in the larger Trump view, it was during the cold war that time and circumstance gave the United States its greatest global advantage. That was when America was great.

* * *

Kushner was the driver of the Trump doctrine. His test cases were China, Mexico, Canada, and Saudi Arabia. He offered each country the opportunity to make his father-in-law happy.

In the first days of the administration, Mexico blew its chance. In transcripts of conversations between Trump and Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto that would later become public, it was vividly clear that Mexico did not understand or was unwilling to play the new game. The Mexican president refused to construct a pretense for paying for the wall, a pretense that might have redounded to his vast advantage (without his having to actually pay for the wall).

Not long after, Canada's new prime minister, Justin Trudeau, a forty-five-year-old globalist in the style of Clinton and Blair, came to Washington and repeatedly smiled and bit his tongue. And that did the trick: Canada quickly became Trump's new best friend.

The Chinese, who Trump had oft maligned during the campaign, came to Mar-a-Lago for a summit advanced by Kushner and Kissinger. (This required some tutoring for Trump, who referred to the Chinese leader as "Mr. X-i"; the president was told to think of him as a woman and call him "she.") They were in an agreeable mood, evidently willing to humor Trump. And they quickly figured out that if you flatter him, he flatters you.

But it was the Saudis, also often maligned during the campaign, who, with their intuitive understanding of family, ceremony, and ritual and propriety, truly scored.

The foreign policy establishment had a long and well-honed relationship with MBS's rival, the crown prince, Mohammed bin Nayef (MBN). Key NSA and State Department figures were alarmed that Kushner's discussions and fast-advancing relationship with MBS would send a dangerous message to MBN. And of course it did. The foreign policy people believed Kushner was being led by MBS, whose real views were entirely untested. The Kushner view was either, naïvely, that he wasn't being led, or, with the confidence of a thirty-six-year-old assuming the new prerogatives of the man in charge, that he didn't care: let's embrace anybody who will embrace us.

The Kushner/MBS plan that emerged was straightforward in a way that foreign policy usually isn't: If you give us what we want, we'll give you what you want. On MBS's assurance that he would deliver some seriously good news, he was invited to visit the White House in March. (The Saudis arrived with a big delegation, but they were received at the White House by only the president's small circle—and the Saudis took particular note that Trump ordered Priebus to jump up and fetch him things during the meeting.) The two large men, the older Trump and much younger MBS—both charmers, flatterers, and country club jokers, each in their way—grandly hit it off.

It was an aggressive bit of diplomacy. MBS was using this Trump embrace as part of his own power play in the kingdom. And the Trump White House, ever denying this was the case, let him. In return, MBS offered a basket of deals and announcements that would coincide with a scheduled presidential visit to Saudi Arabia—Trump's first trip abroad. Trump would get a "win."

Planned before the Comey firing and Mueller hiring, the trip had State Department professionals alarmed. The itinerary—May 19 to May 27—was too long for any president, particularly such an untested and untutored one. (Trump himself, full of phobias about travel and unfamiliar locations, had been grumbling about the burdens of the trip.) But coming immediately after Comey and Mueller it was a get-out-of-Dodge godsend. There couldn't have been a better time to be making headlines far from Washington. A road trip could transform everything.

Almost the entire West Wing, along with State Department and National Security staff, was on board for the trip: Melania Trump, Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner, Reince Priebus, Stephen Bannon, Gary Cohn, Dina Powell, Hope Hicks, Sean Spicer, Stephen Miller, Joe Hagin, Rex Tillerson, and Michael Anton. Also included were Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the deputy press secretary; Dan Scavino, the administration's social media director; Keith Schiller, the president's personal security adviser; and Wilbur Ross, the commerce secretary. (Ross was widely ridiculed for never missing an Air Force One opportunity—as Bannon put it, "Wilbur is Zelig, every time you turn around he's in a picture.") This trip and the robust American delegation was the antidote, and alternate universe to the Mueller appointment.

The president and his son-in-law could barely contain their confidence and enthusiasm. They felt certain that they had set out on the road to peace in the Middle East—and in this, they were much like a number of other administrations that had come before them.

Trump was effusive in his praise for Kushner. “Jared’s gotten the Arabs totally on our side. Done deal,” he assured one of his after-dinner callers before leaving on the trip. “It’s going to be beautiful.”

“He believed,” said the caller, “that this trip could pull it out, like a twist in a bad movie.”

* * *

On the empty roads of Riyadh, the presidential motorcade passed billboards with pictures of Trump and the Saudi king (MBS’s eighty-one-year-old father) with the legend TOGETHER WE PREVAIL.

In part, the president’s enthusiasm seemed to be born out of—or perhaps had caused—a substantial exaggeration of what had actually been agreed to during the negotiations ahead of the trip. In the days before his departure, he was telling people that the Saudis were going to finance an entirely new military presence in the kingdom, supplanting and even replacing the U.S. command headquarters in Qatar. And there would be “the biggest breakthrough in Israel-Palestine negotiations ever.” It would be “*the* game changer, major like has never been seen.”

In truth, his version of what would be accomplished was a quantum leap beyond what was actually agreed, but that did not seem to alter his feelings of zeal and delight.

The Saudis would immediately buy $110 billion’s worth of American arms, and a total of $350 billion over ten years. “Hundreds of billions of dollars of investments into the United States and jobs, jobs, jobs,” declared the president. Plus, the Americans and the Saudis would together “counter violent extremist messaging, disrupt financing of terrorism, and advance defense cooperation.” And they would establish a center in Riyadh to fight extremism. And if this was not exactly peace in the Middle East, the president, according to the secretary of state, “feels like there’s a moment in time here. The president’s going to talk with Netanyahu about the process going forward. He’s going to be talking to President Abbas about what he feels is necessary for the Palestinians to be successful.”

It was all a Trumpian big deal. Meanwhile, the First Family—POTUS, FLOTUS, and Jared and Ivanka—were ferried around in gold golf carts, and the Saudis threw a $75 million party in Trump’s honor, with Trump getting to sit on a thronelike chair. (The president, while receiving an honor from the Saudi king, appeared in a photograph to have bowed, arousing some right-wing ire.)

Fifty Arab and Muslim nations were summoned by the Saudis to pay the president court. The president called home to tell his friends how natural and easy this was, and how, inexplicably and suspiciously, Obama had messed it all up. There "has been a little strain, but there won't be strain with this administration," the president assured Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the king of Bahrain.

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the Egyptian strongman, ably stroked the president and said, "You are a unique personality that is capable of doing the impossible." (To Sisi, Trump replied, "Love your shoes. Boy, those shoes. Man… .")

It was, in dramatic ways, a shift in foreign policy attitude and strategy—and its effects were almost immediate. The president, ignoring if not defying foreign policy advice, gave a nod to the Saudis' plan to bully Qatar. Trump's view was that Qatar was providing financial support to terror groups—pay no attention to a similar Saudi history. (Only *some* members of the Saudi royal family had provided such support, went the new reasoning.) Within weeks of the trip, MBS, detaining MBN quite in the dead of night, would force him to relinquish the Crown Prince title, which MBS would then assume for himself. Trump would tell friends that he and Jared had engineered this: "We've put our man on top!"

From Riyadh, the presidential party went on to Jerusalem, where the president met with Netanyahu and, in Bethlehem, with Abbas, expressing ever greater certainty that, in his third-person guise, "Trump will make peace." Then to Rome to meet the pope. Then to Brussels, where, in character, he meaningfully drew the line between Western-alliance-based foreign policy, which had been firmly in place since World War II, and the new America First ethos.

In Trump's view, all this should have been presidency-shaping stuff. He couldn't believe his dramatic accomplishments weren't getting bigger play. He was simply in denial, Bannon, Priebus, and others noted, about the continuing and competing Comey and Mueller headlines.

One of Trump's deficiencies—a constant in the campaign and, so far, in the presidency—was his uncertain grasp of cause and effect. Until now, whatever problems he might have caused in the past had reliably been supplanted by new events, giving him the confidence that one bad story can always be replaced by a better, more dramatic story. He could always change the conversation. The Saudi trip and his bold campaign to upend the old foreign policy world order should have accomplished exactly that. But the president continued to find himself trapped, incredulously on his part, by Comey and Mueller. Nothing seemed to move on from those two events.

After the Saudi leg of the trip, Bannon and Priebus, both exhausted by the trip's intense proximity to the president and his family, peeled off and headed back to Washington. It was now their job to deal with what had become, in the White House staff's absence, the actual, even ultimate, presidency-shaping crisis.

* * *

What did the people around Trump actually think of Trump? This was not just a reasonable question, it was the question those around Trump most asked themselves. They constantly struggled to figure out what they themselves actually thought and what they thought everybody else was truly thinking.

Mostly they kept their answers to themselves, but in the instance of Comey and Mueller, beyond all the usual dodging and weaving rationalizations, there really wasn't anybody, other than the president's family, who didn't very pointedly blame Trump himself.

This was the point at which an emperors-new-clothes threshold was crossed. Now you could, out loud, rather freely doubt his judgment, acumen, and, most of all, the advice he was getting.

"He's not only crazy," declared Tom Barrack to a friend, "he's stupid."

But Bannon, along with Priebus, had strongly opposed the Comey firing, while Ivanka and Jared had not only supported it, but insisted on it. This seismic event prompted a new theme from Bannon, repeated by him widely, which was that every piece of advice from the couple was bad advice.

Nobody now believed that firing Comey was a good idea; even the president seemed sheepish. Hence, Bannon saw his new role as saving Trump—and Trump would always need saving. He might be a brilliant actor but he could not manage his own career.

And for Bannon, this new challenge brought a clear benefit: when Trump's fortune sank, Bannon's rose.

On the trip to the Middle East, Bannon went to work. He became focused on the figure of Lanny Davis, one of the Clinton impeachment lawyers who, for the better part of two years, became a near round-the-clock spokesperson and public defender of the Clinton White House. Bannon judged Comey-Mueller to be as threatening to the Trump White House as Monica Lewinsky and Ken Starr were to the Clinton White House, and he saw the model for escaping a mortal fate in the Clinton response.

"What the Clintons did was to go to the mattresses with amazing discipline," he explained. "They set up an outside shop and then Bill and Hillary never mentioned it again. They ground through it. Starr had them dead to rights and they got through it."

Bannon knew exactly what needed to be done: seal off the West Wing and build a separate legal and communications staff to defend the president. In this construct, the president would occupy a parallel reality, removed from and uninvolved with what would become an obvious partisan blood sport—as it had in the Clinton model. Politics would be relegated to its nasty corner, and Trump would conduct himself as the president and as the commander in chief.

"So we're going to do it," insisted Bannon, with *joie de guerre* and manic energy, "the way they did it. Separate war room, separate lawyers, separate spokespeople. It's keeping that fight over there so we can wage this other fight over here. Everybody gets this. Well, maybe not Trump so much. Not clear. Maybe a little. Not what he imagined."

Bannon, in great excitement, and Priebus, grateful for an excuse to leave the president's side, rushed back to the West Wing to begin to cordon it off.

It did not escape Priebus's notice that Bannon had in mind to create a rear guard of defenders—David Bossie, Corey Lewandowski, and Jason Miller, all of whom would be outside spokespeople—that would largely be loyal to him. Most of all, it did not escape Priebus that Bannon was asking the president to play a role entirely out of character: the cool, steady, long-suffering chief executive.

And it certainly didn't help that they were unable to hire a law firm with a top-notch white-collar government practice. By the time Bannon and Priebus were back in Washington, three blue-chip firms had said no. All of them were afraid they would face a rebellion among the younger staff if they represented Trump, afraid Trump would publicly humiliate them if the going got tough, and afraid Trump would stiff them for the bill.

In the end, nine top firms turned them down.

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BANNON REDUX

Bannon was back, according to the Bannon faction. According to Bannon himself: "I'm good. I'm *good*. I'm back. I said don't do it. You don't fire the director of the FBI. The geniuses around here thought otherwise."

Was Bannon back? asked the worried other side of the house—Jared and Ivanka, Dina Powell, Gary Cohn, Hope Hicks, H. R. McMaster.

If he was back, that meant he had successfully defied the organizational premise of the Trump White House: the family would always prevail. Steve Bannon had, even in his internal exile, not stopped his running public verbal assault on Jared and Ivanka. Off the record became Bannon's effective on the record. These were bitter, sometimes hilarious, denunciations of the couple's acumen, intelligence, and motives: "They think they're defending him, but they are always defending themselves."

Now he declared they were finished as a power center—destroyed. And if not, they would destroy the president with their terrible and self-serving advice. Even worse than Jared was Ivanka. "She was a nonevent on the campaign. She became a White House staffer and that's when people suddenly realized she's dumb as a brick. A little marketing savvy and has a look, but as far as understanding actually how the world works and what politics is and what it means—nothing. Once you expose that, you lose such credibility. Jared just kind of flits in and does the Arab stuff."

The folks on the Jarvanka side seemed more and more genuinely afraid of what might happen if they crossed the Bannon side. Because the Bannonites, they truly seemed to fear, were assassins.

On the flight to Riyadh, Dina Powell approached Bannon about a leak involving her to a right-wing news site. She told him she knew the leak had come from Julia Hahn, one of Bannon's people and a former Breitbart writer.

"You should take it up with her," said an amused Bannon. "But she's a beast. And she will come at you. Let me know how it works out."

Among Bannon's many regular targets, Powell had become a favorite. She was often billed as Deputy National Security Advisor; that was her sometime designation even in the *New York Times*. Actually, she was Deputy National Security Advisor *for Strategy*—the difference, Bannon pointed out, between the COO of a hotel chain and the concierge.

Coming back from the overseas trip, Powell began to talk in earnest to friends about her timetable to get out of the White House and back into a private-sector job. Sheryl Sandberg, she said, was her model.

"Oh my fucking god," said Bannon.

On May 26, the day before the presidential party returned from the overseas trip, the *Washington Post* reported that during the transition, Kushner and Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador, had, at Kushner's instigation, discussed the possibility of having the Russians set up a private communications channel between the transition team and the Kremlin. The *Post* cited "U.S. officials briefed on intelligence reports." The Jarvanka side believed that Bannon was the source.

Part of the by now deep enmity between the First Family couple and their allies and Bannon and his team was the Jarvanka conviction that Bannon had played a part in many of the reports of Kushner's interactions with the Russians. This was not, in other words, merely an internal policy war; it was a death match. For Bannon to live, Kushner would have to be wholly discredited—pilloried, investigated, possibly even jailed.

Bannon, assured by everyone that there was no winning against the Trump family, hardly tried to hide his satisfied belief that he was going to outplay them. In the Oval Office, in front of her father, Bannon openly attacked her. "You," he said, pointing at her as the president watched, "are a fucking liar." Ivanka's bitter complaints to her father, which in the past had diminished Bannon, were now met by a hands-off Trump: "I told you this is a tough town, baby."

* * *

But if Bannon was back, it was far from clear what being back meant. Trump being Trump, was this true rehabilitation, or did he feel an even deeper rancor toward Bannon for having survived his initial intention to kill him? Nobody really thought Trump forgot—instead, he dwelled and ruminated and chewed. "One of the worst things is when he believes you've succeeded at his expense," explained Sam Nunberg, once on the inside of the Trump circle, then cast to the outside. "If your win is in any way perceived as his loss, phew."

For his part, Bannon believed he was back because, at a pivotal moment, his advice had proved vastly better than that of the "geniuses." Firing Comey, the solve-all-problems Jarvanka solution, had indeed unleashed a set of terrible consequences.

The Jarvanka side believed that Bannon was in essence blackmailing the president. As

Bannon went, so went the virulence of right-wing digital media. Despite his apparent obsession with the "fake news" put out by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN, for the president the threat of fake news was actually greater on the right. Though he would never call out fake news on Fox, Breitbart, and the others, these outlets—which could conceivably spew a catchall of conspiracies in which a weak Trump sold out to a powerful establishment—were potentially far more dangerous than their counterparts on the left.

Bannon, too, was seen to be rectifying an earlier bureaucratic mistake. Where initially he had been content to be the brains of the operation—confident that he was vastly smarter than everybody else (and, indeed, few tried to challenge him for that title)—and not staff up, now he was putting his organization and loyalists firmly in place. His off-balance-sheet communications staff—Bossie, Lewandowski, Jason Miller, Sam Nunberg (even though he had long fallen out with Trump himself), and Alexandra Preate—formed quite a private army of leakers and defenders. What's more, whatever breach there had been between Bannon and Priebus came smoothly together over their mutual loathing of Jared and Ivanka. The professional White House was united against the amateur family White House.

Adding to Bannon's new bureaucratic advantage, he had maximum influence on the staffing of the new firewall team, the lawyers and comm staff who would collectively become the Lanny Davis of the Trump defense. Unable to hire prestige talent, Bannon turned to one of the president's longtime hit-man lawyers, Marc Kasowitz. Bannon had previously bonded with Kasowitz when the attorney had handled a series of near-death problems on the campaign, including dealing with a vast number of allegations and legal threats from an ever growing list of women accusing Trump of molesting and harassing them.

On May 31, the Bannon firewall plan went into effect. Henceforth, all discussion related to Russia, the Mueller and congressional investigations, and other personal legal issues would be entirely handled by the Kasowitz team. The president, as Bannon described the plan in private and as he urged his boss, would no longer be addressing any of these areas. Among the many, many efforts to force Trump into presidential mode, this was the latest.

Bannon then installed Mark Corallo, a former Karl Rove communications staffer, as the firewall spokesperson. He was also planning to put in Bossie and Lewandowski as part of the crisis management team. And at Bannon's prompting, Kasowitz attempted to further insulate the president by giving his client a central piece of advice: send the kids home.

Bannon was indeed back. It was his team. It was his wall around the president—one that he hoped would keep Jarvanka out.

Bannon's formal moment of being back was marked by a major milestone. On June 1, after a long and bitter internal debate, the president announced that he had decided to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement. For Bannon, it was a deeply satisfying slap in the face of liberal rectitude—Elon Musk and Bob Iger immediately resigned from Trump's business council—and confirmation of Trump's true Bannonite instincts.

It was, likewise, the move that Ivanka Trump had campaigned hardest against in the White House.

"Score," said Bannon. "The bitch is dead."

* * *

There are few modern political variables more disruptive than a dedicated prosecutor. It's the ultimate wild card.

A prosecutor means that the issue under investigation—or, invariably, cascading issues—will be a constant media focus. Setting their own public stage, prosecutors are certain leakers.

It means that everybody in a widening circle has to hire a lawyer. Even tangential involvement can cost six figures; central involvement quickly rises into the millions.

By early summer, there was already an intense seller's market in Washington for top criminal legal talent. As the Mueller investigation got under way, White House staffers made a panicky rush to get the best firm before someone else got there first and created a conflict.

"Can't talk about Russia, nothing, can't go there," said Katie Walsh, now three months removed from the White House, on advice of her new counsel.

Any interviews or depositions given to investigators risked putting you in jeopardy. What's more, every day in the White House brought new dangers: any random meeting you might find yourself in exposed you more.

Bannon kept insisting on the absolute importance of this point—and for him the strategic importance. If you didn't want to find yourself getting wrung out in front of Congress, your career and your net worth in jeopardy, be careful who you spoke to. More to the point: you must not under any circumstances speak to Jared and Ivanka, who were now Russia toxic. It was Bannon's widely advertised virtue and advantage: "I've never been to Russia. I don't know anybody from Russia. I've never spoken to any Russians. And I'd just as well not speak to anyone who has."

Bannon observed a hapless Pence in a lot of "wrong meetings," and helped to bring in the Republican operative Nick Ayers as Pence's chief of staff, and to get "our fallback guy" out of the White House and "running around the world and looking like a vice president."

And beyond the immediate fears and disruption, there was the virtually certain outcome that a special prosecutor delegated to find a crime would find one—likely many. Everybody became a potential agent of implicating others. Dominos would fall. Targets would flip.

Paul Manafort, making a good living in international financial gray areas, his risk calculation based on the long-shot odds that an under-the-radar privateer would ever receive close scrutiny, would now be subjected to microscopic review. His nemesis, Oleg Deripaska—still pursuing his $17 million claim against Manafort and himself looking for favorable treatment from federal authorities who had restricted his travel to the United States—was continuing his own deep investigation into Manafort's Russian and Ukrainian business affairs.

Tom Barrack, privy to the president's stream of consciousness as well as his financial history, was suddenly taking stock of his own exposure. Indeed, all the billionaire friends with whom Trump got on the phone and gossiped and rambled were potential witnesses.

In the past, administrations forced to deal with a special prosecutor appointed to investigate and prosecute matters with which the president might have been involved usually became consumed by the effort to cope. Their tenure broke into "before" and "after" periods—with the "after" period hopelessly bogged down in the soap opera of G-man pursuit. Now it looked like the "after" period would be almost the entirety of the Trump administration.

The idea of formal collusion and artful conspiracy—as media and Democrats more or less breathlessly believed or hoped had happened between Trump and the Russians—seemed unlikely to everybody in the White House. (Bannon's comment that the Trump campaign was not organized enough to collude with its own state organizations became everybody's favorite talking point—not least because it was true.) But nobody was vouching for the side deals and freelance operations and otherwise nothing-burger stuff that was a prosecutor's daily bread and the likely detritus of the Trump hangers-on. And everybody believed that if the investigation moved into the long chain of Trump financial transactions, it would almost certainly reach the Trump family and the Trump White House.

And then there was the president's insistent claim that he could do something. *I can fire him*, he would say. Indeed, it was another of his repetitive loops: I can fire him. I *can* fire him. Mueller. The idea of a showdown in which the stronger, more determined, more intransigent, more damn-the-consequences man prevails was central to Trump's own personal mythology. He lived in a mano a mano world, one in which if your own respectability and sense of personal dignity were not a paramount issue—if you weren't weak in the sense of needing to seem like a reasonable and respectable person—you had a terrific advantage. And if you made it personal, if you believed that when the fight really mattered that it was kill or be killed, you were unlikely to meet someone willing to make it as personal as you were.

This was Bannon's fundamental insight about Trump: he made *everything* personal, and he was helpless not to.

* * *

Dissuaded by everyone from focusing his anger on Mueller (at least for now), the president focused on Sessions.

Sessions—"Beauregard"—was a close Bannon ally, and in May and June the president's almost daily digs against the attorney general—beyond even his loyalty and resolve, Trump issued scathing criticism of his stature, voice, and dress—provided a sudden bit of good news for the anti-Bannon side of the house. Bannon, they reasoned, couldn't really be on top if his key proxy was now being blamed for everything bad in Trump's life. As always, Trump's regard or scorn was infectious. If you were in favor, then whatever and whomever he associated with you was also in favor. If you weren't, then everything associated with you was poisonous.

The brutality of Trump's dissatisfaction kept increasing. A small man with a Mr. Magoo stature and an old-fashioned Southern accent, Sessions was bitterly mocked by the president, who drew a corrosive portrait of physical and mental weakness. Insult trauma radiated out of the Oval Office. You could hear it when passing by.

Bannon's efforts to talk the president down—reminding Trump of the difficulties they would encounter during another attorney general confirmation, the importance of Sessions to the hard conservative base, the loyalty that Sessions had shown during the Trump campaign—backfired. To the anti-Bannon side's satisfaction, they resulted in another round of Trump's dissing Bannon.

The attack on Sessions now became, at least in the president's mind, the opening salvo in an active effort to replace Sessions as attorney general. But there were only two candidates to run the Justice Department from whom Trump believed he could extract absolute loyalty, Chris Christie and Rudy Giuliani. He believed they would both perform kamikaze acts for him—just as everyone else knew they would almost certainly never be confirmed.

* * *

As James Comey's testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee approached—it would take place on June 8, twelve days after the presidential traveling party returned home from the long trip to the Middle East and Europe—there began among senior staffers an almost open inquiry into Trump's motives and state of mind.

This seemed spurred by an obvious question: Why hadn't he fired Comey during his first days of office, when it would likely have been seen as a natural changing of the guard with no clear connection to the Russian investigation? There were many equivocal answers: general disorganization, the fast pace of events, and a genuine sense of innocence and naïveté about the Russian charges. But now there seemed to be a new understanding: Donald Trump believed he had vastly more power, authority, and control than in fact he had, and he believed his talent for manipulating people and bending and dominating them was vastly greater than it was. Pushing this line of reasoning just a little further: senior staff believed the president had a problem with reality, and reality was now overwhelming him.

If true, this notion directly contravened the basic premise of the support for Trump among his staff. In some sense, not too closely questioned, they believed he had almost magical powers. Since his success was not explainable, he must have talents beyond what they could fathom. His instincts. Or his salesman's gifts. Or his energy. Or just the fact that he was the opposite of what he was supposed to be. This was out-of-the-ordinary politics—shock-to-the-system politics—but it could work.

But what if it didn't? What if they were all profoundly wrong?

Comey's firing and the Mueller investigation prompted a delayed reckoning that ended months of willing suspension of disbelief. These sudden doubts and considerations—at the highest level of government—did not quite yet go to the president's ability to adequately function in his job. But they did, arguably for the first time in open discussions, go to the view that he was hopelessly prone to self-sabotaging his ability to function in the job. This insight, scary as it was, at least left open the possibility that if all the elements of self-sabotage were carefully controlled—his information, his contacts, his public remarks, and the sense of danger and threat to him—he might yet be able to pull it together and successfully perform.

Quite suddenly, this became the prevailing view of the Trump presidency and the opportunity that still beckoned: you can be saved by those around you or brought down by them.

Bannon believed the Trump presidency would fail in some more or less apocalyptic fashion if Kushner and his wife remained Trump's most influential advisers. Their lack of political or real-world experience had already hobbled the presidency, but since the Comey disaster it was getting worse: as Bannon saw it, they were now acting out of personal panic.

The Kushner side believed that Bannon or Bannonism had pushed the president into a harshness that undermined his natural salesman's abilities to charm and reach out. Bannon and his ilk had made him the monster he more and more seemed to be.

Meanwhile, virtually everybody believed that a large measure of the fault lay in Reince Priebus, who had failed to create a White House that could protect the president from himself—or from Bannon or from his own children. At the same time, believing that the fundamental problem lay in Priebus was easy scapegoating, not to mention little short of risible: with so little power, the chief of staff simply wasn't capable of directing either

Trump or those around him. Priebus himself could, not too helpfully, argue only that no one had any idea how much worse all this would have been without his long-suffering mediation among the president's relatives, his Svengali, and Trump's own terrible instincts. There might be two or three debacles a day, but without Priebus's stoic resolve, and the Trump blows that he absorbed, there might have been a dozen more.

* * *

On June 8, from a little after ten in the morning to nearly one in the afternoon, James Comey testified in public before the Senate Intelligence Committee. The former FBI director's testimony, quite a tour de force of directness, moral standing, personal honor, and damning details, left the country with a simple message: the president was likely a fool and certainly a liar. In the age of modern media politesse, few presidents had been so directly challenged and impugned before Congress.

Here it was, stark in Comey's telling: the president regarded the FBI director as working directly for him, of owing his job to him, and now he wanted something back. "My common sense," said Comey, "again, I could be wrong, but my common sense told me what's going on here is he's looking to get something in exchange for granting my request to stay in the job."

In Comey's telling, the president wanted the FBI to lay off Michael Flynn. And he wanted to stop the FBI from pursuing its Russia-related investigation. The point could hardly have been clearer: if the president was pressuring the director because he feared that an investigation of Michael Flynn would damage him, then this was an obstruction of justice.

The contrast between the two men, Comey and Trump, was in essence the contrast between good government and Trump himself. Comey came across as precise, compartmentalized, scrupulous in his presentation of the details of what transpired and the nature of his responsibility—he was as by-the-book as it gets. Trump, in the portrait offered by Comey, was shady, shoot-from-the-hip, heedless or even unaware of the rules, deceptive, and in it for himself.

After the hearing ended, the president told everybody he had not watched it, but everybody knew he had. To the extent that this was, as Trump saw it, a contest between the two men, it was as direct a juxtaposition as might be imagined. The entire point of the Comey testimony was to recast and contradict what the president had said in his angry and defensive tweets and statements, and to cast suspicion on his actions and motives—and to suggest that the president's intention was to suborn the director of the FBI.

Even among Trump loyalists who believed, as Trump did, that Comey was a phony and this was all a put-up job, the nearly universal feeling was that in this mortal game, Trump was quite defenseless.

* * *

Five days later, on June 13, it was Jeff Sessions's turn to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee. His task was to try to explain the contacts he had had with the Russian ambassador, contacts that had later caused him to recuse himself—and made him the president's punching bag. Unlike Comey, who had been invited to the Senate to show off his virtue—and had seized the opportunity—Sessions had been invited to defend his equivocation, deception, or stupidity.

In an often testy exchange, the attorney general provided a squirrelly view of executive privilege. Though the president had not in fact evoked executive privilege, Sessions deemed it appropriate to try to protect it anyway.

Bannon, watching the testimony from the West Wing, quickly became frustrated. "Come on, Beauregard," he said.

Unshaven, Bannon sat at the head of the long wooden conference table in the chief of staff's office and focused intently on the flat-screen monitor across the room.

"They thought the cosmopolitans would like it if we fired Comey," he said, with "they" being Jared and Ivanka. "The cosmopolitans would be cheering for us for taking down the man who took Hillary down." Where the president saw Sessions as the cause of the Comey fiasco, Bannon saw Sessions as a victim of it.

A sylphlike Kushner, wearing a skinny gray suit and skinny black tie, slipped into the room. (Recently making the rounds was a joke about Kushner being the best-dressed man in Washington, which is quite the opposite of a compliment.) On occasion the power struggle between Bannon and Kushner seemed to take physical form. Bannon's demeanor rarely changed, but Kushner could be petulant, condescending, and dismissive—or, as he was now, hesitating, abashed, and respectful.

Bannon ignored Kushner until the younger man cleared his throat. "How's it going?"

Bannon indicated the television set: as in, *Watch for yourself.*

Finally Bannon spoke. "They don't realize this is about institutions, not people."

"They" would appear to be the Jarvanka side—or an even broader construct referring to all those who mindlessly stood with Trump.

"This town is about institutions," Bannon continued. "We fire the FBI director and we fire the whole FBI. Trump is a man against institutions, and the institutions know it. How do you think that goes down?"

This was shorthand for a favorite Bannon riff: In the course of the campaign, Donald Trump had threatened virtually every institution in American political life. He was a clown-prince version of Jimmy Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Trump believed, offering catnip to deep American ire and resentment, that one man could be bigger than the system. This analysis presupposed that the institutions of political life were as responsive as those in the commercial life that Trump was from—and that they yearned to meet the market and find the Zeitgeist. But what if these institutions—the media, the judiciary, the intelligence community, the greater executive branch itself, and the “swamp” with its law firms, consultants, influence peddlers, and leakers—were in no way eager to adapt? If, by their nature, they were determined to endure, then this accidental president was up against it.

Kushner seemed unpersuaded. “I wouldn’t put it like that,” he said.

“I think that’s the lesson of the first hundred days that some people around here have learned,” said Bannon, ignoring Kushner. “It’s not going to get better. This is what it’s like.”

“I don’t know,” said Kushner.

“Know it,” said Bannon.

“I think Sessions is doing okay,” said Kushner. “Don’t you?”

19

MIKA WHO?

The media had unlocked the value of Donald Trump, but few in the media had unlocked it more directly and personally than Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski. Their MSNBC breakfast show was an ongoing soap-opera-ish or possibly Oprahesque drama about their relationship with Trump—how he had disappointed them, how far they had come from their original regard for him, and how much and how pathetically he regularly embarrassed himself. The bond he once had with them, forged through mutual celebrity and a shared proprietary sense of politics (Scarborough, the former congressman, seemed to feel that he ought reasonably to be president as much as Donald Trump felt he should be), had distinguished the show during the campaign; now its public fraying became part of the daily news cycle. Scarborough and Brzezinski lectured him, channeled the concerns of his friends and family, upbraided him, and openly worried about him—that he was getting the wrong advice (Bannon) and, too, that his mental powers were slipping. They also staked a claim at representing the reasonable center-right alternative to the president, and indeed were quite a good barometer of both the center-right's efforts to deal with him and its day-to-day difficulties of living with him.

Trump, believing he had been used and abused by Scarborough and Brzezinski, claimed he'd stopped watching the show. But Hope Hicks, every morning, quaking, had to recount it for him.

Morning Joe was a ground-zero study in the way the media had over-invested in Trump. He was the whale against which media emotions, self-regard, ego, *joie de guerre*, career advancement, and desire to be at the center of the story, too, all churned in nearly ecstatic obsession. In reverse regard, the media was the same whale, serving the same function, for Trump.

To this Trump added another tic, a lifelong sense that people were constantly taking unfair advantage of him. This perhaps came from his father's cheapness and lack of generosity, or from his own overawareness of being a rich kid (and, no doubt, his insecurities about this), or from a negotiator's profound understanding that it is never win-win, that where there is profit there is loss. Trump simply could not abide the knowledge that somebody was getting a leg up at his expense. His was a zero-sum ecosystem. In the world of Trump, anything that he deemed of value either accrued to him or had been robbed from him.

Scarborough and Brzezinski had taken their relationship with Trump and amply monetized it, while putting no percentage in his pocket—and in this instance, he judged his commission should be slavishly favorable treatment. To say this drove him mad would be an understatement. He dwelled and fixated on the perceived injustice. *Don't mention Joe or Mika to him* was a standing proscription.

His wounded feelings and incomprehension at the failure of people whose embrace he sought to, in return, embrace him was "deep, crazy deep," said his former aide Sam Nunberg, who had run afoul of his need for 100 percent approbation and his bitter suspicion of being profited from.

* * *

Out of this accumulated rage came his June 29 tweet about Mika Brzezinski.

It was classic Trump: there was no mediation between off-the-record language and the public statement. Referring to "low I.Q. Crazy Mika" in one tweet, he wrote in another that she was "bleeding badly from a facelift" when she and Scarborough visited Trump at Mar-a-Lago on the previous New Year's Eve. Many of his tweets were not, as they might seem, spontaneous utterances, but constant ones. Trump's rifts often began as insult comedy and solidified as bitter accusations and then, in an uncontainable moment, became an official proclamation.

The next step, in his tweet paradigm, was universal liberal opprobrium. Almost a week of social media fury, cable breast-beating, and front-page condemnation followed his tweet about Brzezinski. That was accompanied by the other part of the Trump tweet dynamic: by unifying liberal opinion against him, he unified its opposite for him.

In truth, he was often neither fully aware of the nature of what he had said nor fully cognizant of why there should be such a passionate reaction to it. As often as not, he surprised himself. "What did I say?" he would ask after getting severe blowback.

He wasn't serving up these insults for effect—well, not entirely. And his behavior wasn't carefully calculated; it was tit for tat, and he likely would have said what he'd said even if no one was left standing with him. (This very lack of calculation, this inability to be political, was part of his political charm.) It was just his good luck that the Trumpian 35 percent—that standing percentage of people who, according to most polls, seemed to support him no matter what (who would, in his estimation, let him get away with shooting someone on Fifth Avenue)—was largely unfazed and maybe even buoyed by every new expression of Trumpness.

Now, having expressed himself and gotten in the last word, Trump was cheery again.

"Mika and Joe totally love this. It's big ratings for them," said the president, with certain satisfaction and obvious truth.

* * *

Ten days later, a large table of Bannonites was having dinner at the Bombay Club, a high-end Indian restaurant two blocks from the White House. One of the group—Arthur Schwartz, a PR consultant—asked a question about the Mika and Joe affair.

Perhaps it was the noise, but it was also a fitting measure of the speed of events in the Trump era: Bannon lieutenant Alexandra Preate replied, with genuine fogginess, "Who?"

The operetta of the Mika tweets—the uncouthness and verbal abuse demonstrated by the president, his serious lack of control and judgment, and the worldwide censure heaped upon him for it—had already far receded, wholly overshadowed by more Trump eruptions and controversy.

But before moving on to the next episode of ohmygodness, it is worth considering the possibility that this constant, daily, often more than once-a-day, pileup of events—each one canceling out the one before—is the true aberration and novelty at the heart of the Trump presidency.

Perhaps never before in history—not through world wars, the overthrow of empires, periods of extraordinary social transformation, or episodes of government-shaking scandal—have real-life events unfolded with such emotional and plot-thickening impact. In the fashion of binge-watching a television show, one's real life became quite secondary to the public drama. It was not unreasonable to say *Whoa, wait just a minute: public life doesn't happen like this*. Public life in fact lacks coherence and drama. (History, by contrast, attains coherence and drama only in hindsight.)

The process of accomplishing the smallest set of tasks within the sprawling and resistant executive branch is a turtle process. The burden of the White House is the boredom of bureaucracy. All White Houses struggle to rise above that, and they succeed only on occasion. In the age of hypermedia, this has not gotten easier for the White House, it's gotten harder.

It's a distracted nation, fragmented and preoccupied. It was, arguably, the peculiar tragedy of Barack Obama that even as a transformational figure—and inspirational communicator—he couldn't really command much interest. As well, it might be a central tragedy of the news media that its old-fashioned and even benighted civic-minded belief that politics is the highest form of news has helped transform it from a mass business to a narrow-cast one. Alas, politics itself has more and more become a discrete business. Its appeal is B-to-B—business-to-business. The real swamp is the swamp of insular, inbred, incestuous interests. This isn't corruption so much as overspecialization. It's a wonk's life. Politics has gone one way, the culture another. The left-right junkies might pretend otherwise, but the great middle doesn't put political concerns at the top of their minds.

And yet, contravening all cultural and media logic, Donald Trump produced on a daily basis an astonishing, can't-stop-following-it narrative. And this was not even because he was changing or upsetting the fundamentals of American life. In six months as president, failing to master almost any aspect of the bureaucratic process, he had, beyond placing his nominee on the Supreme Court, accomplished, practically speaking, nothing. And yet, *OMG!!!* There almost was no other story in America—and in much of the world. That was the radical and transformational nature of the Trump presidency: it held everybody's attention.

Inside the White House, the daily brouhaha and world's fascination was no cause for joy. It was, in the White House staff's bitter view, the media that turned every day into a climactic, dastardly moment. And, in a sense, this was correct: every development cannot be climactic. The fact that yesterday's climax would soon, compared to the next climax, be piddling, rather bore out the disproportion. The media was failing to judge the relative importance of Trump events: most Trump events came to naught (arguably all of them did), and yet all were greeted with equal shock and horror. The White House staff believed that the media's Trump coverage lacked "context"—by this, they meant that people ought to realize that Trump was mostly just huffing and puffing.

At the same time, few in the White House did not assign blame to Trump for this as well. He seemed to lack the most basic understanding that a president's words and actions would, necessarily, be magnified to the nth power. In some convenient sense, he failed to understand this because he wanted the attention, no matter how often it disappointed him. But he also wanted it because again and again the response surprised him—and, as though every time was the first time, he could not modify his behavior.

Sean Spicer caught the brunt of the daily drama, turning this otherwise reasonable, mild-mannered, process-oriented professional into a joke figure standing at the White House door. In his daily out-of-body experience, as a witness to his own humiliation and loss for words, Spicer understood after a while—although he began to understand this beginning his first day on the job when dealing with the dispute about the inaugural audience numbers—that he had "gone down a rabbit hole." In this disorienting place, all public artifice, pretense, proportion, savvy, and self-awareness had been cast off, or—possibly another result of Trump never really intending to be president—never really figured into the state of being president.

On the other hand, constant hysteria did have one unintended political virtue. If every new event canceled out every other event, like some wacky news-cycle pyramid scheme, then you always survived another day.

* * *

Donald Trump's sons, Don Jr., thirty-nine, and Eric, thirty-three, existed in an enforced infantile relationship to their father, a role that embarrassed them, but one that they also professionally embraced. The role was to be Donald Trump's heirs and attendees. Their father took some regular pleasure in pointing out that they were in the back of the room when God handed out brains—but, then again, Trump tended to scorn anyone who might be smarter than he was. Their sister Ivanka, certainly no native genius, was the designated family smart person, her husband Jared the family's smooth operator. That left Don and Eric to errands and admin. In fact, the brothers had grown into reasonably competent family-owned-company executives (this is not saying all that much) because their father had little or no patience for actually running his company. Of course, quite a good amount of their professional time was spent on the whims, projects, promotions, and general way of life of DJT.

One benefit of their father's run for president was that it kept him away from the office. Still, the campaign's administration was largely their responsibility, so when the campaign went from caprice to a serious development in the Trump business and family, it caused a disruption in the family dynamic. Other people were suddenly eager to be Donald Trump's key lieutenants. There were the outsiders, like Corey Lewandowski, the campaign manager, but there was also the insider, brother-in-law Jared. Trump, not unusually for a family-run company, made everybody compete for his favor. The company was about him; it existed because of his name, personality, and charisma, so the highest standing in the company was reserved for those who could best serve him. There wasn't all that much competition for this role before he ran for president, but in early 2016, with the Republican Party collapsing and Trump rising, his sons faced a new professional and family situation.

Their brother-In-law had been slowly drawn into the campaign, partly at his wife's urging because her father's lack of constraint might actually affect the Trump business if they didn't keep an eye on him. And then he, with his brothers-in-law, was pulled in by the excitement of the campaign itself. By late spring 2016, when the nomination was all but clinched, the Trump campaign was a set of competing power centers with the knives out.

Lewandowski regarded both brothers and their brother-in-law with rolling-on-the-floor contempt: not only were Don Jr. and Eric stupid, and Jared somehow both supercilious and obsequious (the butler), but nobody knew a whit about politics—indeed, there wasn't an hour of political experience among them.

As time went on, Lewandowski became particularly close to the candidate. To the family, especially to Kushner, Lewandowski was an enabler. Trump's worst instincts flowed through Lewandowski. In early June, a little more than a month before the Republican National Convention, Jared and Ivanka decided that what was needed—for the sake of the campaign, for the sake of the Trump business—was an intervention.

Making common cause with Don Jr. and Eric, Jared and Ivanka pushed for a united front to convince Trump to oust Lewandowski. Don Jr., feeling squeezed not only by Lewandowski but by Jared, too, seized the opportunity. He would push out Lewandowski and become his replacement—and indeed, eleven days later Lewandowski would be gone.

All this was part of the background to one of the most preposterous meetings in modern politics. On June 9, 2016, Don Jr., Jared, and Paul Manafort met with a movieworthy cast of dubious characters in Trump Tower after having been promised damaging information about Hillary Clinton. Don Jr., encouraged by Jared and Ivanka, was trying to impress his father that he had the stuff to rise in the campaign.

When this meeting became public thirteen months later, it would, for the Trump White House, encapsulate both the case against collusion with the Russians and the case for it. It was a case, or the lack of one, not of masterminds and subterfuge, but of senseless and benighted people so guileless and unconcerned that they enthusiastically colluded in plain sight.

* * *

Walking into Trump Tower that June day were a well-connected lawyer from Moscow, who was a likely Russian agent; associates of the Azerbaijani Russian oligarch Aras Agalarov; a U.S. music promoter who managed Agalarov's son, a Russian pop star; and a Russian government lobbyist in Washington. Their purpose in visiting the campaign headquarters of a presumptive major party nominee for president of the United States was to meet with three of the most highly placed people on the campaign. This meeting was preceded by an email chain addressed to multiple recipients inside the Trump campaign of almost joyful intent: the Russians were offering a dump of negative or even incriminating information about their opponent.

Among the why-and-how theories of this imbecilic meeting:

- The Russians, in organized or freelance fashion, were trying to entrap the Trump campaign into a compromising relationship.
- The meeting was part of an already active cooperation on the part of the Trump campaign with the Russians to obtain and distribute damaging information about Hillary Clinton—and, indeed, within days of the Don Jr. meeting, WikiLeaks announced that it had obtained Clinton emails. Less than a month later, it started to release them.
- The wide-eyed Trump campaign, largely still playacting at running for president—and with no thought whatsoever of actually winning the election—was open to any and all entreaties and offers, because it had nothing to lose. Dopey Don Jr. (Fredo, as Steve Bannon would dub him, in one of his frequent *Godfather* borrowings) was simply trying to prove he was a player and a go-to guy.
- The meeting included the campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, and the campaign's most influential voice, Jared Kushner, because: (a) a high-level conspiracy was being coordinated; (b) Manafort and Kushner, not taking the campaign very

seriously, and without a thought of any consequence here, were merely entertained by the possibility of dirty tricks; (c) the three men were united in their plan to get rid of Lewandowski—with Don Jr. as the hatchet man—and, as part of this unity, Manafort and Kushner need to show up at Don Jr.'s silly meeting.

Whatever the reason for the meeting, no matter which of the above scenarios most accurately describes how this comical and alarming group came together, a year later, practically nobody doubted that Don Jr. would have wanted his father to know that he seized the initiative.

"The chance that Don Jr. did not walk these jumos up to his father's office on the twenty-sixth floor is zero," said an astonished and derisive Bannon, not long after the meeting was revealed.

"The three senior guys in the campaign," an incredulous Bannon went on, "thought it was a good idea to meet with a foreign government inside Trump Tower in the conference room on the twenty-fifth floor—with no lawyers. *They didn't have any lawyers*. Even if you thought that this was not treasonous, or unpatriotic, or bad shit, and I happen to think it's all of that, you should have called the FBI immediately. Even if you didn't think to do that, and you're totally amoral, and you wanted that information, you do it in a Holiday Inn in Manchester, New Hampshire, with your lawyers who meet with these people and go through everything and then they verbally come and tell another lawyer in a cut-out, and if you've got something, then you figure out how to dump it down to Breitbart or something like that, or maybe some other more legitimate publication. You never see it, you never know it, because you don't need to… . But that's the brain trust that they had."

All of the participants would ultimately plead that the meeting was utterly inconsequential, whatever the hope for it might have been, and admit that it was hapless. But even if that was true, a year later the revelation of the meeting had three profound and probably transformational effects:

First, the constant, ever repeated denials about there having been no discussion between campaign officials and the Russians connected to the Kremlin about the campaign, and, indeed, no meaningful contact between campaign officials and the Russian government, were exploded.

Second, the certainty among the White House staff that Trump himself would have not only been apprised of the details of this meeting, but have met the principals, meant that the president was caught out as a liar by those whose trust he most needed. It was another inflection point between hunkered-in-the-bunker and signed-on-for-the-wild-ride, and get-me-out-of-here.

Third, it was now starkly clear that everyone's interests diverged. The fortunes of Don Jr., Paul Manafort, and Jared Kushner hung individually in the balance. Indeed, the best guess by many in the West Wing was that the details of the meeting had been leaked by the Kushner side, thus sacrificing Don Jr. in an attempt to deflect responsibility away from themselves.

* * *

Even before word of the June 2016 meeting leaked out, Kushner's legal team—largely assembled in a rush since the appointment of Mueller, the special counsel—had been piecing together a forensic picture of both the campaign's Russian contacts and Kushner Companies' finances and money trail. In January, ignoring almost everybody's caution against it, Jared Kushner had entered the White House as a senior figure in the administration; now, six months later, he faced acute legal jeopardy. He had tried to keep a low profile, seeing himself as a behind-the-scenes counselor, but now his public position was not only endangering himself but the future of his family's business. As long as he remained exposed, his family was effectively blocked from most financial sources. Without access to this market, their holdings risked becoming distress debt situations.

Jared and Ivanka's self-created fantasylike life—two ambitious, well-mannered, well-liked young people living at the top of New York's social and financial world after having, in their version of humble fashion, accepted global power—had now, even with neither husband nor wife in office long enough to have taken any real action at all, come to the precipice of disgrace.

Jail was possible. So was bankruptcy. Trump may have been talking defiantly about offering pardons, or bragging about his power to give them, but that did not solve Kushner's business problems, nor did it provide a way to mollify Charlie Kushner, Jared's choleric and often irrational father. What's more, successfully navigating through the eye of the legal needle would require a careful touch and nuanced strategic approach on the part of the president—quite an unlikely development.

Meanwhile, the couple blamed everyone else in the White House. They blamed Priebus for the disarray that had produced a warlike atmosphere that propelled constant and damaging leaks, they blamed Bannon for leaking, and they blamed Spicer for poorly defending their virtue and interests.

They *needed* to defend themselves. One strategy was to get out of town (Bannon had a list of all the tense moments when the couple had taken a convenient holiday), and it happened that Trump would be attending the G20 summit Hamburg, Germany, on July 7 and 8. Jared and Ivanka accompanied the president on the trip, and while at the summit they learned that word of Don Jr.'s meeting with the Russians—and the couple kept pointedly presenting it as Don Jr.'s meeting—had leaked. Worse, they learned that the story was about to break in the *New York Times*.

Originally, Trump's staff was expecting details of the Don Jr. meeting to break on the website *Circa*. The lawyers, and spokesperson Mark Corallo, had been working to manage this news. But while in Hamburg, the president's staff learned that the *Times* was developing a story that had far more details about the meeting—quite possibly supplied by the Kushner side—which it would publish on Saturday, July 8. Advance knowledge of this article was kept from the president's legal team for the ostensible reason that it didn't involve the president.

In Hamburg, Ivanka, knowing the news would shortly get out, was presenting her signature effort: a World Bank fund to aid women entrepreneurs in developing countries. This was another instance of what White House staffers saw as the couple's extraordinarily off-message direction. Nowhere in the Trump campaign, nowhere on Bannon's white boards, nowhere in the heart of this president was there an interest in women entrepreneurs in developing countries. The daughter's agenda was singularly at odds with the father's—or at least the agenda that had elected him. Ivanka, in the view of almost every White House staffer, profoundly misunderstood the nature of her job and had converted traditional First Lady noblesse oblige efforts into White House staff work.

Shortly before boarding Air Force One for the return trip home, Ivanka—with what by now was starting to seem like an almost anarchic tone deafness—sat in for her father between Chinese president Xi Jinping and British prime minister Theresa May at the main G20 conference table. But this was mere distraction: as the president and his team huddled on the plane, the central subject was not the conference, it was how to respond to the *Times* story about Don Jr.'s and Jared's Trump Tower meeting, now only hours away from breaking.

En route to Washington, Sean Spicer and everybody else from the communications office was relegated to the back of the plane and excluded from the panicky discussions. Hope Hicks became the senior communications strategist, with the president, as always, her singular client. In the days following, that highest political state of being "in the room" was turned on its head. *Not* being in the room—in this case, the forward cabin on Air Force One—became an exalted status and get-out-of-jail-free card. "It used to hurt my feelings when I saw them running around doing things that were my job," said Spicer. "Now I'm glad to be out of the loop."

Included in the discussion on the plane were the president, Hicks, Jared and Ivanka, and their spokesperson, Josh Raffel. Ivanka, according to the later recollection of her team, would shortly leave the meeting, take a pill, and go to sleep. Jared, in the telling of his team, might have been there, but he was "not taking a pencil to anything." Nearby, in a small conference room watching the movie *Fargo*, were Dina Powell, Gary Cohn, Stephen Miller, and H. R. McMaster, all of whom would later insist that they were, however physically close to the unfolding crisis, removed from it. And, indeed, anyone "in the room" was caught in a moment that would shortly receive the special counsel's close scrutiny, with the relevant question being whether one or more federal employees had induced other federal employees to lie.

An aggrieved, unyielding, and threatening president dominated the discussion, pushing into line his daughter and her husband, Hicks, and Raffel. Kasowitz—the lawyer whose specific job was to keep Trump at arm's length from Russian-related matters—was kept on hold on the phone for an hour and then not put through. The president insisted that the meeting in Trump Tower was purely and simply about Russian adoption policy. That's what was discussed, period. Period. Even though it was likely, if not certain, that the *Times* had the incriminating email chain—in fact, it was quite possible that Jared and Ivanka and the lawyers *knew* the *Times* had this email chain—the president ordered that no one should let on to the more problematic discussion about Hillary Clinton.

It was a real-time example of denial and cover-up. The president believed, belligerently, what he believed. Reality was what he was convinced it was—or should be. Hence the official story: there was a brief courtesy meeting in Trump Tower about adoption policy, to no result, attended by senior aides and unaffiliated Russian nationals. The crafting of this manufactured tale was a rogue operation by rookies—always the two most combustible elements of a cover-up.

In Washington, Kasowitz and the legal team's spokesperson, Mark Corallo, weren't informed of either the *Times* article or the plan for how to respond to it until Don Jr.'s initial statement went out just before the story broke that Saturday.

Over the course of next seventy-two hours or so, the senior staff found itself wholly separate from—and, once again, looking on in astonishment at—the actions of the president's innermost circle of aides. In this, the relationship of the president and Hope Hicks, long tolerated as a quaint bond between the older man and a trustworthy young woman, began to be seen as anomalous and alarming. Completely devoted to accommodating him, she, his media facilitator, was the ultimate facilitator of unmediated behavior. His impulses and thoughts—unedited, unreviewed, unchallenged—not only passed through him, but, via Hicks, traveled out into the world without any other White House arbitration.

"The problem isn't Twitter, it's Hope," observed one communication staffer.

On July 9, a day after publishing its first story, the *Times* noted that the Trump Tower meeting was specifically called to discuss the Russian offer of damaging material about Clinton. The next day, as the *Times* prepared to publish the full email chain, Don Jr. hurriedly dumped it himself. There followed an almost daily count of new figures—all, in their own way, peculiar and unsettling—who emerged as participants in the meeting.

But the revelation of the Trump Tower meeting had another, perhaps even larger dimension. It marked the collapse of the president's legal strategy: the demise of Steve Bannon's Clinton-emulating firewall around the president.

The lawyers, in disgust and alarm, saw, in effect, each principal becoming a witness to another principal's potential misdeeds—all conspiring with one another to get their stories straight. The client and his family were panicking and running their own defense. Short-term headlines were overwhelming any sort of long-term strategy. "The worst thing you can do is lie to a prosecutor," said one member of the legal team. The persistent Trump idea that it is not a crime to lie to the media was regarded by the legal team as at best reckless and, in itself, potentially actionable: an explicit attempt to throw sand into the investigation's gears.

Mark Corallo was instructed not to speak to the press, indeed not to even answer his phone. Later that week, Corallo, seeing no good outcome—and privately confiding that he believed the meeting on Air Force One represented a likely obstruction of justice—quit. (The Jarvanka side would put it out that Corallo was fired.)

"These guys are not going to be second-guessed by the kids," said a frustrated Bannon about the firewall team.

Likewise, the Trump family, no matter its legal exposure, was not going to be run by its lawyers. Jared and Ivanka helped to coordinate a set of lurid leaks—alleging drinking, bad behavior, personal life in disarray—about Marc Kasowitz, who had advised the president to send the couple home. Shortly after the presidential party returned to Washington, Kasowitz was out.

* * *

Blame continued to flow. The odor of a bitter new reality, if not doom, that attached to the Comey-Mueller debacle was compounded by everyone's efforts not to be tagged by it.

The sides in the White House—Jared, Ivanka, Hope Hicks, and an increasingly ambivalent Dina Powell and Gary Cohn on one side, and almost everyone else, including Priebus, Spicer, Conway, and most clearly Bannon, on the other—were most distinguished by their culpability in or distance from the Comey-Mueller calamity. It was, as the non-Jarvanka side would unceasingly point out, a calamity *of their own making*. Therefore it became an effort of the Jarvankas not only to achieve distance for themselves from the causes of the debacle—such involvement as they had they now cast as strictly passive involvement or just following orders—but to suggest that their adversaries were at least equally at fault.

Shortly after the Don Jr. story broke, the president not unsuccessfully changed the subject by focusing the blame for the Comey-Mueller mess on Sessions, even more forcefully belittling and threatening him and suggesting that his days were numbered.

Bannon, who continued to defend Sessions, and who believed that he had militantly—indeed with scathing attacks on the Jarvankas for their stupidity—walled himself off from the Comey smashup, was now suddenly getting calls from reporters with leaks that painted him as an engaged participant in the Comey decision.

In a furious phone call to Hicks, Bannon blamed the leaks on her. In time, he had come to see the twenty-eight-year-old as nothing more than a hapless presidential enabler and poor-fish Jarvanka flunky—and he believed she had now deeply implicated herself in the entire disaster by participating in the Air Force One meeting. The next day, with more inquiries coming from reporters, he confronted Hicks inside the cabinet room, accusing her of doing Jared and Ivanka's dirty work. The face-off quickly escalated into an existential confrontation between the two sides of the White House—two sides on a total war footing.

"*You don't know what you're doing*," shouted a livid Bannon at Hicks, demanding to know who she worked for, the White House or Jared and Ivanka. "*You don't know how much trouble you are in*," he screamed, telling her that if she didn't get a lawyer he would call her father and tell him he had better get her one. "*You are dumb as a stone!*" Moving from the cabinet room across the open area into the president's earshot, "a loud, scary, clearly threatening" Bannon, in the Jarvanka telling, yelled, "*I am going to fuck you and your little group!*" with a baffled president plaintively wanting to know, "What's going on?"

In the Jarvanka-side account, Hicks then ran from Bannon, hysterically sobbing and "visibly terrified." Others in the West Wing marked this as the high point of the boiling enmity between the two sides. For the Jarvankas, Bannon's rant was also a display that they believed they could use against him. The Jarvanka people pushed Priebus to refer the matter to the White House counsel, billing this as the most verbally abusive moment in the history of the West Wing, or at least certainly up among the most abusive episodes ever.

For Bannon, this was just more Jarvanka desperation—they were the ones, not him, saddled with Comey-Mueller. They were the ones panicking and out of control.

For the rest of his time in the White House, Bannon would not speak to Hicks again.

20

MCMASTER AND SCARAMUCCI

Trump was impetuous and yet did not like to make decisions, at least not ones that seemed to corner him into having to analyze a problem. And no decision hounded him so much—really from the first moment of his presidency—as what to do about Afghanistan. It was a conundrum that became a battle. It involved not only his own resistance to analytic reasoning, but the left brain/right brain divide of his White House, the split between those who argued for disruption and those who wanted to uphold the status quo.

In this, Bannon became the disruptive and unlikely White House voice for peace—or anyway a kind of peace. In Bannon's view, only he and the not-too-resolute backbone of Donald Trump stood between consigning fifty thousand more American soldiers to hopelessness in Afghanistan.

Representing the status quo—and, ideally, a surge on top of the status quo—was H. R. McMaster, who, next to Jarvanka, had become Bannon's prime target for abuse. On this front, Bannon forged an easy bond with the president, who didn't much hide his contempt for the Power-Point general. Bannon and the president enjoyed trash-talking McMaster together.

McMaster was a protégé of David Petraeus, the former CENTCOM and Afghanistan commander who became Obama's CIA director before resigning in a scandal involving a love affair and the mishandling of classified information. Petraeus and now McMaster represented a kind of business-as-usual approach in Afghanistan and the Middle East. A stubborn McMaster kept proposing to the president new versions of the surge, but at each pitch Trump would wave him out of the Oval Office and roll his eyes in despair and disbelief.

The president's distaste and rancor for McMaster grew on pace with the approaching need to finally make a decision on Afghanistan, a decision he continued to put off. His position on Afghanistan—a military quagmire he knew little about, other than that it was a quagmire—had always been a derisive and caustic kiss-off of the sixteen-year war. Having inherited it did not make his feelings warmer or inspire him to want to dwell on it further. He knew the war was cursed and, knowing that, felt no need to know more. He put the responsibility for it on two of his favorite people to blame: Bush and Obama.

For Bannon, Afghanistan represented one more failure of establishment thinking. More precisely, it represented the establishment's inability to confront failure.

Curiously, McMaster had written a book on exactly this subject, a scathing critique of the unchallenged assumptions with which military leaders pursued the Vietnam War. The book was embraced by liberals and the establishment, with whom, in Bannon's view, McMaster had become hopelessly aligned. And now—ever afraid of the unknown, intent on keeping options open, dedicated to stability, and eager to protect his establishment cred —McMaster was recommending a huge troop surge in Afghanistan.

* * *

By early July, the pressure to make a decision was approaching the boiling point. Trump had already authorized the Pentagon to deploy the troop resources it believed were needed, but Defense Secretary Mattis refused to act without a specific authorization from the president. Trump would finally have to make the call—unless he could find a way to put it off again.

Bannon's thought was that the decision could be made for the president—a way the president liked to have decisions made—if Bannon could get rid of McMaster. That would both head off the strongest voice for more troops and also avenge Bannon's ouster by McMaster's hand from the NSC.

With the president promising that he would make up his mind by August, and McMaster, Mattis, and Tillerson pressing for a decision as soon as possible, Bannon-inspired media began a campaign to brand McMaster as a globalist, interventionist, and all around not-our-kind-of-Trumper—and, to boot, soft on Israel.

It was a scurrilous, albeit partly true, attack. McMaster was in fact talking to Petraeus often. The kicker was the suggestion that McMaster was giving inside dope to Petraeus, a pariah because of his guilty plea regarding his mishandling of classified information. It was also the case that McMaster was disliked by the president and on the point of being dismissed.

It was Bannon, riding high again, enjoying himself in a moment of supreme overconfidence.

Indeed, in part to prove there were other options beyond more troops or humiliating defeat—and logically there probably weren't more options—Bannon became a sponsor of Blackwater-founder Erik Prince's obviously self-serving idea to replace the U.S. military force with private contractors and CIA and Special Operations personnel. The notion was briefly embraced by the president, then ridiculed by the military.

By now Bannon believed McMaster would be out by August. He was sure he had the president's word on this. Done deal. "McMaster wants to send more troops to Afghanistan, so we're going to send *him*," said a triumphal Bannon. In Bannon's scenario, Trump would give McMaster a fourth star and "promote" him to top military commander in Afghanistan.

As with the chemical attack in Syria, it was Dina Powell—even as she made increasingly determined efforts to get herself out of the White House, either on a Sheryl Sandberg trajectory or, stopping first at a way station, as ambassador to the United Nations—who struggled to help support the least disruptive, most keep-all-options-open approach. In this, both because the approach seemed like the safest course and because it was the opposite of Bannon's course, she readily recruited Jared and Ivanka.

The solution Powell endorsed, which was designed to put the problem and the reckoning off for another year or two or three, was likely to make the United States' position in Afghanistan even more hopeless. Instead of sending fifty or sixty thousand troops—which, at insupportable cost and the risk of national fury, might in fact win the war—the Pentagon would send some much lower number, one which would arouse little notice and merely prevent us from losing the war. In the Powell and Jarvanka view, it was the moderate, best-case, easiest-to-sell course, and it struck just the right balance between the military's unacceptable scenarios: retreat and dishonor or many more troops.

Before long, a plan to send four, five, six, or (tops) seven thousand troops became the middle-course strategy supported by the national security establishment and most everyone else save for Bannon and the president. Powell even helped design a PowerPoint deck that McMaster began using with the president: pictures of Kabul in the 1970s when it still looked something like a modern city. It could be like this again, the president was told, if we are resolute!

But even with almost everyone arrayed against him, Bannon was confident he was winning. He had a united right-wing press with him, and, he believed, a fed-up, working-class Trump base—its children the likely Afghanistan fodder. Most of all, he had the president. Pissed off that he was being handed the same problem and the same options that were handed Obama, Trump continued to heap spleen and mockery on McMaster.

Kushner and Powell organized a leak campaign in McMaster's defense. Their narrative was not a pro-troops defense; instead, it was about Bannon's leaks and his use of right-wing media to besmirch McMaster, "one of the most decorated and respected generals of his generation." The issue was not Afghanistan, the issue was Bannon. In this narrative, it was McMaster, a figure of stability, against Bannon, a figure of disruption. It was the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, who came to the defense of McMaster, against Breitbart and its cronies and satellites.

It was the establishment and never-Trumpers against the America-first Trumpkins. In many respects, Bannon was outgunned and outnumbered, yet he still thought he had it nailed. And when he won, not only would another grievously stupid chapter in the war in Afghanistan be avoided, but Jarvanka, and Powell, their factotum, would be further consigned to irrelevance and powerlessness.

* * *

As the debate moved toward resolution, the NSC, in its role as a presenter of options rather than an advocate for them (although of course it was advocating, too), presented three: withdrawal; Erik Prince's army of contractors; and a conventional, albeit limited, surge.

Withdrawal, whatever its merits—and however much a takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban could be delayed or mitigated—still left Donald Trump with having lost a war, an insupportable position for the president.

The second option, a force of contractors and the CIA, was largely deep-sixed by the CIA. The agency had spent sixteen years successfully avoiding Afghanistan, and everyone knew that careers were not advanced in Afghanistan, they died in Afghanistan. So please keep us out of it.

That left McMaster's position, a modest surge, argued by Secretary of State Tillerson: more troops in Afghanistan, which, somehow, slightly, would be there on a different basis, somewhat, with a different mission, subtly, than that of troops sent there before.

The military fully expected the president to sign off on the third option. But on July 19, at a meeting of the national security team in the situation room at the White House, Trump lost it.

For two hours, he angrily railed against the mess he had been handed. He threatened to fire almost every general in the chain of command. He couldn't fathom, he said, how it had taken so many months of study to come up with this nothing-much-different plan. He disparaged the advice that came from generals and praised the advice from enlisted men. If we have to be in Afghanistan, he demanded, why can't we make money off it? China, he complained, has mining rights, but not the United States. (He was referring to a ten-year-old U.S.-backed deal.) This is just like the 21 Club, he said, suddenly confusing everyone with this reference to a New York restaurant, one of his favorites. In the 1980s, 21 closed for a year and hired a large number of consultants to analyze how to make the restaurant more profitable. In the end, their advice was: Get a bigger kitchen. *Exactly what any waiter would have said*, Trump shouted.

To Bannon, the meeting was a high point of the Trump presidency to date. The generals were punting and waffling and desperately trying to save face—they were, according to Bannon, talking pure "gobbledygook" in the situation room. "Trump was standing up to them," said a happy Bannon. "Hammering them. He left a bowel movement in the middle of their Afghan plans. Again and again, he came back to the same point:

we're stuck and losing and nobody here has a plan to do much better than that."

Though there was still no hint of a viable alternative strategy in Afghanistan, Bannon, his Jarvanka frustration cresting, was sure he was the winner here. McMaster was toast.

* * *

Later on the day of the Afghanistan briefing, Bannon heard about yet another harebrained Jarvanka scheme. They planned to hire Anthony Scaramucci, aka "the Mooch."

After Trump had clinched the nomination more than a year before, Scaramucci—a hedge funder and go-to Trump surrogate for cable business news (mostly Fox Business Channel)—had become a reliable presence at Trump Tower. But then, in the last month of the campaign, with polls predicting a humiliating Trump defeat, he was suddenly nowhere to be seen. The question "Where's the Mooch?" seemed to be just one more indicator of the campaign's certain and pitiless end.

But on the day after the election, Steve Bannon—soon to be named chief strategist for the forty-fifth president-elect—was greeted as he arrived midmorning in Trump Tower by Anthony Scaramucci, holding a Starbucks coffee for him.

Over the next three months, Scaramucci, although no longer needed as a surrogate and without anything else particularly to do, became a constant hovering—or even lurking—presence at Trump Tower. Ever unflagging, he interrupted a meeting in Kellyanne Conway's office in early January just to make sure she knew that her husband's firm, Wachtell, Lipton, was representing him. Having made that point, name-dropping and vastly praising the firm's key partners, he then helped himself to a chair in Conway's meeting and, for both Conway's and her visitor's benefit, offered a stirring testimonial to the uniqueness and sagacity of Donald Trump and the working-class people—speaking of which, he took the opportunity to provide a résumé of his own Long Island working-class bona fides—who had elected him.

Scaramucci was hardly the only hanger-on and job seeker in the building, but his method was among the most dogged. He spent his days looking for meetings to be invited into, or visitors to engage with—this was easy because every other job seeker was looking for someone with whom to chat it up, so he soon became something like the unofficial official greeter. Whenever possible, he would grab a few minutes with any senior staffer who would not rebuff him. As he waited to be offered a high White House position, he was, he seemed personally certain, reaffirming his loyalty and team spirit and unique energy. He was so confident about his future that he made a deal to sell his hedge fund, Skybridge Capital, to HNA Group, the Chinese megaconglomerate.

Political campaigns, substantially based on volunteer help, attract a range of silly, needy, and opportunistic figures. The Trump campaign perhaps scraped lower in the barrel than most. The Mooch, for one, might not have been the most peculiar volunteer in the Trump run for president, but many figured him to be among the most shameless.

It was not just that before he became a dedicated supporter of Donald Trump, he was a dedicated naysayer, or that he had once been an Obama and Hillary Clinton supporter. The problem was that, really, nobody liked him. Even for someone in politics, he was immodest and incorrigible, and followed by a trail of self-serving and often contradictory statements made to this person about that person, which invariably made it back to whatever person was being most negatively talked about.

He was not merely a shameless self-promoter; he was a *proud* self-promoter. He was, by his own account, a fantastic networker. (This boast was surely true, since Skybridge Capital was a fund of funds, which is less a matter of investment acumen than of knowing top fund managers and being able to invest with them.) He had paid as much as half a million dollars to have his firm's logo appear in the movie *Wall Street 2* and to buy himself a cameo part in the film. He ran a yearly conference for hedge funders at which he himself was the star. He had a television gig at Fox Business Channel. He was a famous partier every year at Davos, once exuberantly dancing alongside the son of Muammar Gaddafi.

As for the presidential campaign, when signing on with Donald Trump—after he had bet big against Trump—he billed himself as a version of Trump, and he saw the two of them as a new kind of showman and communicator set to transform politics.

Although his persistence and his constant on-the-spot personal lobbying might not have endeared him to anybody, it did prompt the "What to do with Scaramucci?" question, which somehow came to beg an answer. Priebus, trying to deal with the Mooch problem and dispose of him at the same time, suggested that he take a money-raising job as finance director of the RNC—an offer Scaramucci rebuffed in a blowup in Trump Tower, loudly bad-mouthing Priebus in vivid language, a mere preview of what was to come.

While he wanted a job with the Trump administration, the Mooch specifically wanted one of the jobs that would give him a tax break on the sale of his business. A federal program provides for deferred payment of capital gains in the event of a sale of property to meet ethical requirements. Scaramucci needed a job that would get him a "certificate of divestiture," which is what an envious Scaramucci knew Gary Cohn had received for the sale of his Goldman stock.

A week before the inaugural he was finally offered such a job: director of the White House Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs. He would be the president's representative and cheerleader before Trump-partial interest groups.

But the White House ethics office balked—the sale of his business would take months to complete and he would be directly negotiating with an entity that was at least in part controlled by the Chinese government. And because Scaramucci had little support from anybody else, he was effectively blocked. It was, a resentful Scaramucci noted, one of the few instances in the Trump government when someone's business conflicts interfered with a White House appointment.

And yet with a salesman's tenacity, the Mooch pressed on. He appointed himself a Trump ambassador without portfolio. He declared himself Trump's man on Wall Street, even if, practically speaking, he wasn't a Trump man and he was exiting his firm on Wall Street. He was also in constant touch with anybody from the Trump circle who was willing to be in touch with him.

The "What to do with the Mooch" question persisted. Kushner, with whom Scaramucci had exercised a rare restraint during the campaign, and who had steadily heard from other New York contacts about Scaramucci's continued loyalty, helped push the question.

Priebus and others held Scaramucci at bay until June and then, as a bit of a punch line, Scaramucci was offered and, degradingly, had to accept, being named senior vice president and chief strategy officer for the U.S. Export-Import Bank, an executive branch agency Trump had long vowed to eliminate. But the Mooch was not ready to give up the fight: after yet more lobbying, he was offered, at Bannon's instigation, the post of ambassador to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The job came with a twenty-room apartment on the Seine, a full staff, and—Bannon found this part particularly amusing—absolutely no influence or responsibilities.

* * *

Meanwhile, another persistent question, "What to do with Spicer," seemed to somehow have been joined to the disaster involving the bungled response to the news of the June 2016 meeting between Don Jr., Jared, and the Russians. Since the president, while traveling on Air Force One, had actually dictated Don Jr.'s response to the initial *Times* report about the meeting, the blame for this should have been laid at the feet of Trump and Hope Hicks: Trump dictated, Hicks transcribed. But because no disasters could be laid at the president's feet, Hicks herself was spared. And, even though he had been pointedly excluded from the Trump Tower crisis, the blame for the episode was now put at Spicer's feet, precisely because, his loyalty in doubt, he and the communications staff *had* to be excluded.

In this, the comms team was judged to be antagonistic if not hostile to the interests of Jared and Ivanka; Spicer and his people had failed to mount an inclusive defense for them, nor had the comms team adequately defended the White House. This of course homed in on the essential and obvious point: although the junior first couple were mere staffers and not part of the institutional standing of the White House, they thought and acted as if they were part of the presidential entity. Their ire and increasing bitterness came from some of the staff's reluctance—really, a deep and intensifying resistance—to treat them as part and parcel of the presidency. (Once Priebus had to take Ivanka aside to make sure she understood that in her official role, she was just a staffer. Ivanka had insisted on the distinction that she was a staffer-slash-First Daughter.)

Bannon was their public enemy; they expected nothing of him. But Priebus and Spicer they regarded as functionaries, and their job was to support the White House's goals, which included their goals and interests.

Spicer, ever ridiculed in the media for his cockamamie defense of the White House and a seeming dumb loyalty, had been judged by the president, quite from the inauguration, to be not loyal enough and not nearly as aggressive as he should be in Trump's defense. Or, in Jared and Ivanka's view, in his family's defense. "What does Spicer's forty-member comm staff actually *do*?" was a persistent First Family question.

* * *

Almost from the beginning, the president had been interviewing potential new press secretaries. He appeared to have offered the job to various people, one of whom was Kimberly Guilfoyle, the Fox News personality and cohost of *The Five*. Guilfoyle, the former wife of California Democrat Gavin Newsom, was also reported to be Anthony Scaramucci's girlfriend, a rumor he denied. Unbeknownst to the White House, Scaramucci's personal life was in dramatic free fall. On July 9, nine months pregnant with their second child, Scaramucci's wife filed for divorce.

Guilfoyle, knowing that Spicer was on his way out but having decided not to take his job—or, according to others in the White House, never having been offered it—suggested Scaramucci, who set to work convincing Jared and Ivanka that theirs was largely a PR problem and that they were ill served by the current communications team.

Scaramucci called a reporter he knew to urge that an upcoming story about Kushner's Russian contacts be spiked. He followed up by having another mutual contact call the reporter to say that if the story was spiked it would help the Mooch get into the White House, whereupon the reporter would have special Mooch access. The Mooch then assured Jared and Ivanka that he had, in this clever way, killed the story.

Now Scaramucci had their attention. *We need some new thinking*, the couple thought; *we need somebody who is more on our side*. The fact that Scaramucci was from New York, and Wall Street, and was rich, reassured them that he understood what the deal was. And that he would understand the stakes and know that an aggressive game needed to be played.

On the other hand, the couple did not want to be perceived as being heavy-handed. So, after bitterly accusing Spicer of not defending them adequately, they suddenly backed off and suggested that they were just looking to add a new voice to the mix. The job of White House communications director, which had no precise purview, had been vacant since May, when Mike Dubke, whose presence at the White House had hardly registered, resigned. Scaramucci could take this job, the couple figured, and in that role he could be their ally.

"He's good on television," Ivanka told Spicer when she explained the rationale for hiring a former hedge fund manager as White House communications director. "Maybe he can help us.”

It was the president who, meeting with Scaramucci, was won over by the Mooch’s cringeworthy Wall Street hortatory flattery. (“I can only hope to realize a small part of your genius as a communicator, but you are my example and model” was one report of the gist of the Scaramucci supplication.) And it was Trump who then urged that Scaramucci become the true communications chief, reporting directly to the president.

On July 19, Jared and Ivanka, through intermediaries, put a feeler out to Bannon: What would he think about Scaramucci’s coming on board in the comms job?

So preposterous did this seem to Bannon—it was a cry of haplessness, and certain evidence that the couple had become truly desperate—that he refused to consider or even reply to the question. Now he was sure: Jarvanka was losing it.

21

BANNON AND SCARAMUCCI

Bannon's apartment in Arlington, Virginia, a fifteen-minute drive from downtown Washington, was called the "safe house." This seemed somehow to acknowledge his transience and to nod, with whatever irony, to the underground and even romantic nature of his politics—the roguish and *joie de guerre* alt-right. Bannon had decamped here from the Breitbart Embassy on A Street on Capitol Hill. It was a one-bedroom graduate-student sort of apartment, in a mixed-use building over a mega-McDonald's—quite belying Bannon's rumored fortune—with five or six hundred books (emphasis on popular history) stacked against the wall without benefit of shelving. His lieutenant, Alexandra Preate, also lived in the building, as did the American lawyer for Nigel Farage, the right-wing British Brexit leader who was part of the greater Breitbart circle.

On the evening on Thursday, July 20, the day after the contentious meeting about Afghanistan, Bannon was hosting a small dinner—organized by Preate, with Chinese takeout. Bannon was in an expansive, almost celebratory, mood. Still, Bannon knew, just when you felt on top of the world in the Trump administration, you could probably count on getting cut down. That was the pattern and price of one-man leadership—insecure-man leadership. The other biggest guy in the room always had to be reduced in size.

Many around him felt Bannon was going into another bad cycle. In his first run around the track, he'd been punished by the president for his *Time* magazine cover and for the *Saturday Night Live* portrayal of "President Bannon"—that cruelest of digs to Trump. Now there was a new book, *The Devil's Bargain*, and it claimed, often in Bannon's own words, that Trump could not have done it without him. The president was again greatly peeved.

Still, Bannon seemed to feel he had broken through. Whatever happened, he had clarity. It was such a mess inside in the White House that, if nothing else, this clarity would put him on top. His agenda was front and center, and his enemies sidelined. Jared and Ivanka were getting blown up every day and were now wholly preoccupied with protecting themselves. Dina Powell was looking for another job. McMaster had screwed himself on Afghanistan. Gary Cohn, once a killer enemy, was now desperate to be named

Fed chairman and currying favor with Bannon—"licking my balls," Bannon said with a quite a cackle. In return for supporting Cohn's campaign to win the Fed job, Bannon was extracting fealty from him for the right-wing trade agenda.

The geniuses were fucked. Even POTUS might be fucked. But Bannon had the vision and the discipline—he was sure he did. "I'm cracking my shit every day. The nationalist agenda, we're fucking owning it. I'll be there for the duration."

Before the dinner, Bannon had sent around an article from the *Guardian*—though one of the leading English-language left-leaning newspapers, it was nevertheless Bannon's favorite paper—about the backlash to globalization. The article, by the liberal journalist Nikil Saval, both accepted Bannon's central populist political premise—"the competition between workers in developing and developed countries … helped drive down wages and job security for workers in developed countries"—and elevated it to the epochal fight of our time. Davos was dead and Bannon was very much alive. "Economists who were once ardent proponents of globalization have become some of its most prominent critics," wrote Saval. "Erstwhile supporters now concede, at least in part, that it has produced inequality, unemployment and downward pressure on wages. Nuances and criticisms that economists only used to raise in private seminars are finally coming out in the open."

"I'm starting to get tired of winning" was all that Bannon said in his email with the link to the article.

Now, restless and pacing, Bannon was recounting how Trump had dumped on McMaster and, as well, savoring the rolling-on-the-floor absurdity of the geniuses' Scaramucci gambit. But most of all he was incredulous about something else that had happened the day before.

Unbeknownst to senior staff, or to the comms office—other than by way of a pro forma schedule note—the president had given a major interview to the *New York Times*. Jared and Ivanka, along with Hope Hicks, had set it up. The *Times*'s Maggie Haberman, Trump's bête noire ("very mean, and not smart") and yet his go-to journalist for some higher sort of approval, had been called in to see the president with her colleagues Peter Baker and Michael Schmidt. The result was one of the most peculiar and ill-advised interviews in presidential history, from a president who had already, several times before, achieved that milestone.

In the interview, Trump had done his daughter and son-in-law's increasingly frantic bidding. He had, even if to no clear end and without certain strategy, continued on his course of threatening the attorney general for recusing himself and opening the door to a special prosecutor. He openly pushed Sessions to resign—mocking and insulting him and daring him to try to stay. However much this seemed to advance no one's cause, except perhaps that of the special prosecutor, Bannon's incredulity—"Jefferson Beauregard Sessions is not going to go anywhere"—was most keenly focused on another remarkable passage in the interview: the president had admonished the special counsel not to cross the line into his family's finances.

"Ehhh ... ehhh ... ehhh!" screeched Bannon, making the sound of an emergency alarm. "Don't look here! Let's tell a prosecutor what *not* to look at!"

Bannon then described the conversation he'd had with the president earlier that day: "I went right into him and said, 'Why did you say that?' And he says, 'The Sessions thing?' and I say, 'No, that's bad, but it's another day at the office.' I said, 'Why did you say it was off limits to go after your family's finances?' And he says, 'Well, it is … .' I go, 'Hey, they are going to determine their mandate… . You may not like it, but you just guaranteed if you want to get anybody else in [the special counsel] slot, every senator will make him swear that the first thing he's going to do is come in and subpoena your fucking tax returns.' "

Bannon, with further disbelief, recounted the details of a recent story from the *Financial Times* about Felix Sater, one of the shadiest of the shady Trump-associated characters, who was closely aligned with Trump's longtime personal lawyer, Michael Cohen (reportedly a target of the Mueller investigation), and a key follow-the-money link to Russia. Sater, "get ready for it—I know this may shock you, but wait for it"—had had major problems with the law before, "caught with a couple of guys in Boca running Russian money through a boiler room." And, it turns out, "Brother Sater" was prosecuted by—"wait"—*Andrew Weissmann*. (Mueller had recently hired Weissmann, a high-powered Washington lawyer who headed the DOJ's criminal fraud division.) "You've got the LeBron James of money laundering investigations on you, Jarvanka. My asshole just got so tight!"

Bannon quite literally slapped his sides and then returned to his conversation with the president. "And he goes, 'That's not their mandate.' Seriously, dude?"

Preate, putting out the Chinese food on a table, said, "It wasn't their mandate to put Arthur Andersen out of business during Enron, but that didn't stop Andrew Weissmann"—one of the Enron prosecutors.

"You realize where this is going," Bannon continued. "This is all about *money laundering*. Mueller chose Weissmann first and he is a money laundering guy. Their path to fucking Trump goes right through Paul Manafort, Don Jr., and Jared Kushner … It's as plain as a hair on your face… . It goes through all the Kushner shit. They're going to roll those two guys up and say play me or trade me. But … *'executive privilege!'* " Bannon mimicked. " 'We've got executive privilege!' There's no executive privilege! We proved that in Watergate."

An expressive man, Bannon seemed to have suddenly exhausted himself. After a pause, he added wearily: "They're sitting on a beach trying to stop a Category Five."

With his hands in front of him, he mimed something like a force field that would isolate him from danger. “It’s not my deal. He’s got the five geniuses around him: Jarvanka, Hope Hicks, Dina Powell, and Josh Raffel.” He threw up his hands again, this time as if to say *Hands off*. “I know no Russians, I don’t know nothin’ about nothin’. I’m not being a witness. I’m not hiring a lawyer. It is not going to be my ass in front of a microphone on national TV answering questions. Hope Hicks is so fucked she doesn’t even know it. They are going to lay her out. They’re going to crack Don Junior like an egg on national TV. Michael Cohen, cracked like an egg. He”—the president—“said to me everybody would take that Don Junior meeting with the Russians. I said, ‘Everybody would *not* take that meeting.’ I said, ‘I’m a naval officer. I’m not going to take a meeting with Russian nationals, and do it in headquarters, are you fucking insane?’ and he says, ‘But he’s a good boy.’ There were no meetings like that after I took over the campaign.”

Bannon’s tone veered from ad absurdum desperation to resignation.

“If he fires Mueller it just brings the impeachment quicker. Why not, let’s do it. Let’s get it on. Why not? What am I going to do? Am I going to go in and save him? He’s Donald Trump. He’s always gonna do things. He wants an unrecused attorney general. I told him if Jeff Sessions goes, Rod Rosenstein goes, and then Rachel Brand”—the associate attorney general, next in line after Rosenstein—“goes, we’ll be digging down into Obama career guys. An Obama guy will be acting attorney general. I said you’re not going to get Rudy”—Trump had again revived a wish for his loyalists Rudy Giuliani or Chris Christie to take the job—“because he was on the campaign and will have to recuse himself, and Chris Christie, too, so those are masturbatory fantasies, get those out of your brain. And, for anybody to get confirmed now, they are going to have to swear and ensure that things will go ahead and they won’t fire anybody, because you said yesterday—*Ehhh ... ehhh ... .ehhh!*—‘my family finances are off limits,’ and they’re going to demand that, whoever he is, he promises and commits to make the family finances part of this investigation. I told him as night follows day that’s a lock, so you better hope Sessions stays around.”

“He was calling people in New York last night asking what he should do,” added Preate. (Almost everybody in the White House followed Trump’s thinking by tracking whom he had called the night before.)

Bannon sat back and, with steam-rising frustration—almost a cartoon figure—he outlined his Clinton-like legal plan. “They went to the mattresses with amazing discipline. They ground through it.” But that *was* about discipline, he emphasized, and Trump, said Bannon, noting the obvious, was the least disciplined man in politics.

It was clear where Mueller and his team were going, said Bannon: they would trace a money trail through Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn, Michael Cohen, and Jared Kushner and roll one or all of them on the president.

It’s Shakespearean, he said, enumerating the bad advice from his family circle: “It’s the geniuses, the same people who talked him into firing Comey, the same people on Air Force One who cut out his outside legal team, knowing the email was out there, knowing that email existed, put the statement out about Don Junior, that the meeting was all about adoptions … the same geniuses trying to get Sessions fired.

"Look, Kasowitz has known him for twenty-five years. Kasowitz has gotten him out of all kinds of jams. Kasowitz on the campaign—what did we have, a hundred women? Kasowitz took care of all of them. And now he's out in, what, four weeks? He's New York's toughest lawyer. Mark Corallo, toughest motherfucker I ever met, just can't do it."

Jared and Ivanka believe, said Bannon, that if they advocate prison reform and save DACA—the program to protect the children of illegal immigrants—the liberals will come to their defense. He digressed briefly to characterize Ivanka Trump's legislative acumen, and her difficulty—which had become quite a White House preoccupation—in finding sponsorship for her family leave proposal. "Here's why, I keep telling her: there's no political constituency in it. You know how easy it is to get a bill sponsored, any schmendrick can do it. You know why your bill has no sponsorship? Because people realize how *dumb* it is." In fact, said, Bannon, eyes rolling and mouth agape, it was the Jarvanka idea to try to trade off amnesty for the border wall. "If not the dumbest idea in Western civilization, it's up there in the top three. Do these geniuses even know who we are?"

Just then Bannon took a call, the caller telling him that it looked as if Scaramucci might indeed be getting the job of communications director. "Don't fuck with me, dude," he laughed. "Don't fuck with me like that!"

He got off the phone expressing further wonder at the fantasy world of the geniuses—and added, for good measure, an extra dollop of dripping contempt for them. "I literally do not talk to them. You know why? I'm doing my shit, and they got nothing to do with it, and I don't care what they're doing … I don't care… . I'm not going to be alone with them, I'm not going to be in a room with them. Ivanka walked into the Oval today … [and] as soon as she walked in, I looked at her and walked right out… . I won't be in a room … don't want to do it… . Hope Hicks walked in, I walked out."

"The FBI put Jared's father in jail," said Preate. "Don't they understand you don't mess —"

"Charlie Kushner," said Bannon, smacking his head again in additional disbelief. "He's going crazy because they're going to get down deep in his shit about how he's financed everyfhing… . all the shit coming out of Israel … and all these guys coming out of Eastern Europe … all these Russian guys … and guys in Kazakhstan… . And he's frozen on 666 [Fifth Avenue]… . [If] it goes under next year, the whole thing's cross-collateralized … he's wiped, he's gone, he's done, it's over… . Toast."

He held his face in his hands for a moment and then looked up again.

"I'm pretty good at coming up with solutions, I came up with a solution for his broke-dick campaign in about a day, but I don't see this. I don't see a plan for getting through. Now, I gave him a plan, I said you seal the Oval Office, you send those two kids home, you get rid of Hope, all these deadbeats, and you listen to your legal team—Kasowitz, and Mark Dowd, and Jay Sekulow, and Mark Corallo, these are all professionals who have done this many times. You listen to those guys and never talk about this stuff again, you just conduct yourself as commander in chief and then you can be president for eight years. If you don't, you're not, simple. But he's the president, he gets a choice, and he's clearly choosing to go down another path … and you can't stop him. The guy is going to call his own plays. He's Trump… ."

And then another call came, this one from Sam Nunberg. He, too, was calling about Scaramucci, and his words caused something like stupefaction in Bannon: "No fucking, fucking way."

Bannon got off the phone and said, "Jesus. Scaramucci. I can't even respond to this. It's Kafkaesque. Jared and Ivanka needed somebody to represent their shit. It's madness. He'll be on that podium for two days and he'll be so chopped he'll bleed out everywhere. He'll literally blow up in a week. This is why I don't take this stuff seriously. Hiring Scaramucci? He's not qualified to do anything. He runs a fund of funds. Do you know what a fund of funds is? It's not a fund. Dude, it's sick. We look like buffoons."

* * *

The ten days of Anthony Scaramucci, saw, on the first day, July 21, the resignation of Sean Spicer. Oddly, this seemed to catch everyone unawares. In a meeting with Scaramucci, Spicer, and Priebus, the president—who in his announcement of Scaramucci's hire as communications director had promoted Scaramucci not only over Spicer, but in effect over Priebus, his chief of staff—suggested that the men ought to be able to work it out together.

Spicer went back to his office, printed out his letter of resignation, and then took it back to the nonplussed president, who said again that he really wanted Spicer to be a part of things. But Spicer, surely the most mocked man in America, understood that he had been handed a gift. His White House days were over.

For Scaramucci, it was now payback time. Scaramucci blamed his six humiliating months out in the cold on nobody so much as Reince Priebus—having announced his White House future, having sold his business in anticipation of it, he had come away with nothing, or at least nothing of any value. But now, in a reversal befitting a true master of the universe—befitting, actually, Trump himself—Scaramucci was in the White House, bigger, better, and grander than even he had had the gall to imagine. And Priebus was dead meat.

That was the signal the president had sent Scaramucci—deal with the mess. In Trump's view, the problems in his tenure so far were just problems about the team. If the team went, the problems went. So Scaramucci had his marching orders. The fact that the president had been saying the same stuff about his rotten team from the first day, that this riff had been a constant from the campaign on, that he would often say he wanted everybody to go and then turn around and say he *didn't* want everybody to go—all that rather went over Scaramucci's head.

Scaramucci began taunting Priebus publicly, and inside the West Wing he adopted a tough-guy attitude about Bannon—"I won't take his bullshit." Trump seemed delighted with this behavior, which led Scaramucci to feel that the president was urging him on. Jared and Ivanka were pleased, too; they believed they had scored with Scaramucci and were confident that he would defend them against Bannon and the rest.

Bannon and Priebus remained not just disbelieving but barely able not to crack up. For both men, Scaramucci was either a hallucinatory episode—they wondered whether they ought to just shut their eyes while it passed—or some further march into madness.

* * *

Even as measured against other trying weeks in the Trump White House, the week of July 24 was a head-slammer. First, it opened the next episode in what had become a comic-opera effort to repeal Obamacare in the Senate. As in the House, this had become much less about health care than a struggle both among Republicans in Congress and between the Republican leadership and the White House. The signature stand for the Republican Party had now become the symbol of its civil war.

On that Monday, the president's son-in-law appeared at the microphones in front of the West Wing to preview his statement to Senate investigators about the Trump campaign's connections to Russia. Having almost never spoken before in public, he now denied culpability in the Russian mess by claiming feckless naïveté; speaking in a reedy, self-pitying voice, he portrayed himself as a Candide-like figure who had become disillusioned by a harsh world.

And that evening, the president traveled to West Virginia to deliver a speech before the Boy Scouts of America. Once more, his speech was tonally at odds with time, place, and good sense. It prompted an immediate apology from the Boy Scouts to its members, their parents, and the country at large. The quick trip did not seem to improve Trump's mood: the next morning, seething, the president again publicly attacked his attorney general and—for good measure and no evident reason—tweeted his ban of transgender people in the military. (The president had been presented with four different options related to the military's transgender policy. The presentation was meant to frame an ongoing discussion, but ten minutes after receiving the discussion points, and without further consultation, Trump tweeted his transgender ban.)

The following day, Wednesday, Scaramucci learned that one of his financial disclosure forms seemed to have been leaked; assuming he'd been sabotaged by his enemies, Scaramucci blamed Priebus directly, implicitly accusing him of a felony. In fact, Scaramucci's financial form was a public document available to all.

That afternoon, Priebus told the president that he understood he should resign and they should start talking about his replacement.

Then, that evening, there was a small dinner in the White House, with various current and former Fox News people, including Kimberly Guilfoyle, in attendance—and this was leaked. Drinking more than usual, trying desperately to contain the details of the meltdown of his personal life (being linked to Guilfoyle wasn't going to help his negotiation with his wife), and wired by events beyond his own circuits' capacity, Scaramucci called a reporter at the *New Yorker* magazine and unloaded.

The resulting article was surreal—so naked in its pain and fury, that for almost twenty-four hours nobody seemed to be able to quite acknowledge that he had committed public suicide. The article quoted Scaramucci speaking bluntly about the chief of staff: "Reince Priebus—if you want to leak something—he'll be asked to resign very shortly." Saying that he had taken his new job "to serve the country" and that he was "not trying to build my brand," Scaramucci also took on Steve Bannon: "I'm not Steve Bannon. I'm not trying to suck my own cock." (In fact, Bannon learned about the piece when fact-checkers from the magazine called him for comment about Scaramucci's accusation that he sucked his own cock.)

Scaramucci, who had in effect publicly fired Priebus, was behaving so bizarrely that it wasn't at all clear who would be the last man standing. Priebus, on the verge of being fired for so long, realized that he might have agreed to resign too soon. He might have gotten the chance to fire Scaramucci!

On Friday, as health care repeal cratered in the Senate, Priebus joined the president on board Air Force One for a trip to New York for a speech. As it happened, so did Scaramucci, who, avoiding the *New Yorker* fallout, had said he'd gone to New York to visit his mother but in fact had been hiding out at the Trump Hotel in Washington. Now here he was, with his bags (he would indeed now stay in New York and visit his mother), behaving as though nothing had happened.

On the way back from the trip, Priebus and the president talked on the plane and discussed the timing of his departure, with the president urging him to do it the right way and to take his time. "You tell me what works for you," said Trump. "Let's make it good."

Minutes later, Priebus stepped onto the tarmac and an alert on his phone said the president had just tweeted that there was a new chief of staff, Department of Homeland Security chief John Kelly, and that Priebus was out.

The Trump presidency was six months old, but the question of who might replace Priebus had been a topic of discussion almost from day one. Among the string of candidates were Powell and Cohn, the Jarvanka favorites; OMB director Mick Mulvaney, one of the Bannon picks; and Kelly.

In fact, Kelly—who would soon abjectly apologize to Priebus for the basic lack of courtesy in the way his dismissal was handled—had not been consulted about his appointment. The president's tweet was the first he knew of it.

But indeed there was no time to waste. Now the paramount issue before the Trump government was that somebody would have to fire Scaramucci. Since Scaramucci had effectively gotten rid of Priebus—the person who logically should have fired *him*—the new chief of staff was needed, more or less immediately, to get rid of the Mooch.

And six days later, just hours after he was sworn in, Kelly fired Scaramucci.

Chastened themselves, the junior first couple, the geniuses of the Scaramucci hire, panicked that they would, deservedly, catch the blame for one of the most ludicrous if not catastrophic hires in modern White House history. Now they rushed to say how firmly they supported the decision to get rid of Scaramucci.

"So I punch you in the face," Sean Spicer noted from the sidelines, "and then say, 'Oh my god, we've got to get you to a hospital!' "

22

GENERAL KELLY

On August 4, the president and key members of the West Wing left for Trump's golf club in Bedminster. The new chief of staff, General Kelly, was in tow, but the president's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, had been left behind. Trump was grouchy about the planned seventeen-day trip, bothered by how diligently his golf dates were being clocked by the media. So this was now dubbed a "working" trip—another piece of Trump vanity that drew shrugs, eye rolling, and head shaking from a staff that had been charged with planning events that looked like work even as they were instructed to leave yawning expanses of time for golf.

During the president's absence, the West Wing would be renovated—Trump, the hotelier and decorator, was "disgusted" by its condition. The president did not want to move over to the nearby Executive Office Building, where the West Wing business would temporarily be conducted—and where Steve Bannon sat waiting for his call to go to Bedminster.

He was about to leave for Bedminster, Bannon kept telling everyone, but no invitation came. Bannon, who claimed credit for bringing Kelly into the administration in the first place, was unsure where he stood with the new chief. Indeed, the president himself was unsure about where he himself stood; he kept asking people if Kelly liked him. More generally, Bannon wasn't entirely clear *what* Kelly was doing, other than his duty. Where exactly did the new chief of staff fit in Trumpworld?

While Kelly stood somewhere right of center on the political spectrum and had been a willing tough immigration enforcer at Homeland Security, he was not anywhere near so right as Bannon or Trump. "He's not hardcore" was Bannon's regretful appraisal. At the same time, Kelly was certainly not close in any way to the New York liberals in the White House. But politics was not his purview. As director of Homeland Security he had watched the chaos in the White House with disgust and thought about quitting. Now he had agreed to try to tame it. He was sixty-seven, resolute, stern, and grim. "Does he ever smile?" asked Trump, who had already begun to think that he had somehow been tricked into the hire.

Some Trumpers, particularly those with over-the-transom access to the president, believed that he had been tricked into some form of very-much-not-Trump submission. Roger Stone, one of those people whose calls Kelly was now shielding the president from, spread the dark scenario that Mattis, McMaster, and Kelly had agreed that no military action would ever be taken unless the three were in accord—and that at least one of them would always remain in Washington if the others were away.

After Kelly dispatched Scaramucci, his two immediate issues, now on the table in Bedminster, were the president's relatives and Steve Bannon. One side or the other obviously had to go. Or perhaps both should go.

It was far from clear whether a White House chief of staff who saw his function as establishing command process and enforcing organizational hierarchy—directing a decision funnel to the commander in chief—could operate effectively or even exist in a White House where the commander in chief's children had special access and overriding influence. As much as the president's daughter and son-in-law were now offering slavish regard for the new command principals, they would, surely, by habit and temperament, override Kelly's control of the West Wing. Not only did they have obvious special influence with the president, but important members of the staff saw them as having this juice, and hence believed that they were the true north of West Wing advancement and power.

Curiously, for all their callowness, Jared and Ivanka had become quite a fearsome presence, as feared by others as the two of them feared Bannon. What's more, they had become quite accomplished infighters and leakers—they had front-room *and* back-channel power—although, with great woundedness, they insisted, incredibly, that they never leaked. "If they hear someone talking about them, because they are so careful about their image and have crafted this whole persona—it's like anyone who tries to pierce it or say something against it is like a big problem," said one senior staffer. "They get very upset and will come after you."

On the other hand, while "the kids" might make Kelly's job all but impossible, keeping Bannon on board didn't make a lot of sense, either. Whatever his gifts, he was a hopeless plotter and malcontent, bound to do an end run around any organization. Besides, as the Bedminster hiatus—working or otherwise—began, Bannon was once more on the president's shit list.

The president continued to stew about *The Devil's Bargain*, the book by Joshua Green that gave Bannon credit for the election. Then, too, while the president tended to side with Bannon against McMaster, the campaign to defend McMaster, supported by Jared and Ivanka, was having an effect. Murdoch, enlisted by Jared to help defend McMaster, was personally lobbying the president for Bannon's head. Bannonites felt they had to defend Bannon against an impulsive move by the president: so now, not only did they brand McMaster as weak on Israel, they persuaded Sheldon Adelson to lobby Trump—Bannon, Adelson told the president, was the only person he trusted on Israel in the White House. Adelson's billions and implacability always impressed Trump, and his endorsement, Bannon believed, significantly strengthened his hand.

But overriding the management of the harrowing West Wing dysfunction, Kelly's success—or even relevance, as he was informed by almost anyone who was in a position to offer him an opinion—depended on his rising to the central challenge of his job, which was how to manage Trump. Or, actually, how to live with not managing him. His desires, needs, and impulses had to exist—*necessarily* had to exist—outside the organizational structure. Trump was the one variable that, in management terms, simply could not be controlled. He was like a recalcitrant two-year-old. If you tried to control him, it would only have the opposite effect. In this, then, the manager had to most firmly manage his own expectations.

In an early meeting with the president, General Kelly had Jared and Ivanka on his agenda—how the president saw their role; what he thought was working and not working about it; how he envisioned it going forward. It was all intended to be a politic way of opening a discussion about getting them out. But the president was, Kelly soon learned, delighted with all aspects of their performance in the West Wing. Maybe at some point Jared would become secretary of state—that was the only change the president seemed to foresee. The most Kelly could do was to get the president to acknowledge that the couple should be part of a greater organizational discipline in the West Wing and should not so readily jump the line.

This, at least, was something that the general could try to enforce. At a dinner in Bedminster—the president dining with his daughter and son-in-law—the First Family were confused when Kelly showed up at the meal and joined them. This, they shortly came to understand, was neither an attempt at pleasant socializing nor an instance of unwarranted over-familiarity. It was enforcement: Jared and Ivanka needed to go through him to talk to the president.

But Trump had made clear his feeling that the roles played by the kids in his administration needed only minor adjustment, and this now presented a significant problem for Bannon. Bannon really had believed that Kelly would find a way to send Jarvanka home. How could he not? Indeed, Bannon had convinced himself that they represented the largest danger to Trump. They would take the president down. As much, Bannon believed that *he* could not remain in the White House if they did.

Beyond Trump's current irritation with Bannon, which many believed was just the usual constant of Trump resentment and complaint, Bannonites felt that their leader had, at least policywise, gained the upper hand. Jarvanka was marginalized; the Republican leadership, after health care, was discredited; the Cohn-Mnuchin tax plan was a hash. Through one window, the future looked almost rosy for Bannon. Sam Nunberg, the former Trump loyalist who was now wholly a Bannon loyalist, believed that Bannon would stay in the White House for two years and then leave to run Trump's reelection campaign. "If you can get this idiot elected twice," Nunberg marveled, you would achieve something like immortality in politics.

But through another window, Bannon couldn't possibly remain in place. He seemed to have moved into a heightened state that allowed him to see just how ridiculous the White House had become. He could barely hold his tongue—indeed, he couldn't hold it. Pressed, he could not see the future of the Trump administration. And, while many Bannonites argued the case for Jarvanka ineffectiveness and irrelevance—just ignore them, they said—Bannon, with mounting ferocity and pubic venom, could abide them less and less every day.

Bannon, continuing to wait for his call to join the president in Bedminster, decided that he would force the situation and offered his resignation to Kelly. But this was in fact a game of chicken: he wanted to stay. On the other hand, he wanted Jarvanka to go. And that became an effective ultimatum.

* * *

At lunch on August 8, in the Clubhouse at Bedminster—amid Trumpish chandeliers, golf trophies, and tournament plaques—the president was flanked by Tom Price, the secretary of health and human services, and his wife, Melania. Kellyanne Conway was at the lunch; so were Kushner and several others. This was one of the "make-work" events—over lunch, there was a discussion of the opioid crisis, which was then followed by a statement from the president and a brief round of questions from reporters. While reading the statement in a monotone, Trump kept his head down, propping it on his elbows.

After taking some humdrum questions about opioids, he was suddenly asked about North Korea, and, quite as though in stop-action animation, he seemed to come alive.

North Korea had been a heavy-on-detail, short-on-answers problem that that he believed was the product of lesser minds and weaker resolve—and that he had trouble paying attention to. What's more, he had increasingly personalized his antagonism with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, referring to him often with derogatory epithets.

His staff had not prepared him for this, but, in apparent relief that he could digress from the opioid discussion, as well as sudden satisfaction at the opportunity to address this nagging problem, he ventured out, in language that he'd repeated often in private—as he repeated everything often—to the precipice of an international crisis.

"North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with the fire and the fury like the world has never seen. He has been very threatening beyond a normal state, and as I said they will be met with fire and fury and frankly power, the likes of which this world has never seen before. Thank you."

* * *

North Korea, a situation the president had been consistently advised to downplay, now became the central subject of the rest of the week—with most senior staff occupied not so much by the topic itself, but by how to respond to the president, who was threatening to “blow” again.

Against this background, almost no one paid attention to the announcement by the Trump supporter and American neo-Nazi Richard Spencer that he was organizing a protest at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, over the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee. “Unite the Right,” the theme of the rally called for Saturday, August 12, was explicitly designed to link Trump’s politics with white nationalism.

On August 11, with the president in Bedminster continuing to threaten North Korea—and also, inexplicably to almost everyone on his staff, threatening military intervention in Venezuela—Spencer called for an evening protest.

At 8:45 p.m.—with the president in for the night in Bedminster—about 250 young men dressed in khaki pants and polo shirts, quite a Trump style of dress, began an organized parade across the UVA campus while carrying kerosene torches. Parade monitors with headsets directed the scene. At a signal, the marchers began chanting official movement slogans: “Blood and soil!” “You will not replace us!” “Jews will not replace us!” Soon, at the center of campus, near a statue of UVA’s founder, Thomas Jefferson, Spencer’s group was met by a counterprotest. With virtually no police presence, the first of the weekend’s melees and injuries ensued.

Beginning again at eight o’clock the next morning, the park near the Lee statue became the battleground of a suddenly surging white racist movement, with clubs, shields, mace, pistols, and automatic rifles (Virginia is an “open carry” state)—a movement seemingly, and to liberal horror, born out of the Trump campaign and election, as in fact Richard Spencer intended it to seem. Opposing the demonstrators was a hardened, militant left called to the barricades. You could hardly have better set an end-times scene, no matter the limited numbers of protesters. Much of the morning involved a series of charges and countercharges—a rocks-and-bottles combat, with a seemingly hands-off police force standing by.

In Bedminster, there was still little awareness of the unfolding events in Charlottesville. But then, at about one o’clock in the afternoon, James Alex Fields Jr., a twenty-year-old would-be Nazi, plunged his Dodge Charger into a group of counterprotesters, killing thirty-two-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring a score of others.

In a tweet hurriedly composed by his staff, the president declared: “We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Lets come together as one!”

Otherwise, however, it was largely business as usual for the president—Charlottesville was a mere distraction, and indeed, the staff’s goal was to keep him off North Korea. The main event in Bedminster that day was the ceremonial signing of an act extending the funding of a program that let veterans obtain medical care outside VA hospitals. The signing was held in a big ballroom at the Clubhouse two hours after Alex Field's attack.

During the signing, Trump took a moment to condemn the "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides" in Charlottesville. Almost immediately, the president came under attack for the distinction he had appeared to refuse to draw between avowed racists and the other side. As Richard Spencer had correctly understood, the president's sympathies were muddled. However easy and obvious it was to condemn white racists—even self-styled neo-Nazis—he instinctively resisted.

It wasn't until the next morning that the White House finally tried to clarify Trump's position with a formal statement: "The President said very strongly in his statement yesterday that he condemns all forms of violence, bigotry, and hatred. Of course that includes white supremacists, KKK neo-Nazi and all extremist groups. He called for national unity and bringing all Americans together."

But in fact he hadn't condemned white supremacists, KKK, and neo-Nazis—and he continued to be stubborn about not doing it.

In a call to Bannon, Trump sought help making his case: "Where does this all end? Are they going to take down the Washington Monument, Mount Rushmore, Mount Vernon?" Bannon—still not receiving his summons to Bedminster—urged this to be the line: the president should condemn violence and misfits and also defend history (even with Trump's weak grasp of it). Stressing the literal issue of monuments would bedevil the left and comfort the right.

But Jared and Ivanka, with Kelly backing them, urged presidential behavior. Their plan was to have Trump return to the White House and address the issue with a forceful censure of hate groups and racial politics—exactly the unambiguous sort of position Richard Spencer had strategically bet Trump would not willingly take.

Bannon, understanding these same currents in Trump, lobbied Kelly and told him that the Jarvanka approach would backfire: *It will be clear his heart's not in it,* said Bannon.

The president arrived shortly before eleven o'clock on Monday morning at a White House under construction and a wall of shouted questions about Charlottesville: "Do you condemn the actions of neo-Nazis? Do you condemn the actions of white supremacists?" Some ninety minutes later he stood in the Diplomatic Reception Room, his eyes locked on to the teleprompter, and delivered a six-minute statement.

Before getting to the point: "Our economy is now strong. The stock market continues to hit record highs, unemployment is at a sixteen-year low, and businesses are more optimistic than ever before. Companies are moving back to the United States and bringing many thousands of jobs with them. We have already created over one million jobs since I took office."

And only then: “We must love each other, show affection for each other and unite together in condemnation of hatred, bigotry and violence… . We must rediscover the bonds of love and loyalty that bring us together as Americans… . Racism is evil. And those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans.”

It was a reluctant mini-grovel. It was something of a restaging of the take-it-back birther speech about Obama during the campaign: much distraction and obfuscation, then a mumbled acknowledgment. Similarly, he looked here, trying to tow the accepted line on Charlottesville, like a kid called on the carpet. Resentful and petulant, he was clearly reading forced lines.

And in fact he got little credit for these presidential-style remarks, with reporters shouting questions about why it had taken him so long to address the issue. As he got back on Marine One to head to Andrews Air Force Base and on to JFK and then into Manhattan and Trump Tower, his mood was dark and I-told-you-so. Privately, he kept trying to rationalize why someone would be a member of the KKK—that is, they might not actually believe what the KKK believed, and the KKK probably does not believe what it used to believe, and, anyway, who really knows what the KKK believes now? In fact, he said, his own father was accused of being involved with the KKK—not true. (In fact, yes, true.)

The next day, Tuesday, August 15, the White House had a news conference scheduled at Trump Tower. Bannon urged Kelly to cancel it. It was a nothing conference anyway. Its premise was about infrastructure—about undoing an environmental regulation that could help get projects started faster—but it was really just another effort to show that Trump was working and not just on a holiday. So why bother? What’s more, Bannon told Kelly, he could see the signs: the arrow on the Trump pressure cooker was climbing, and before long he’d blow.

The news conference went ahead anyway. Standing at the lectern in the lobby of Trump Tower, the president stayed on script for mere minutes. Defensive and self-justifying, he staked out a contrition-is-bunk, the-fault-lies-everywhere-else position and then dug in deep. He went on without an evident ability to adjust his emotions to political circumstance or, really, even to make an effort to save himself. It was yet one more example, among his many now, of the comic-absurd, movielike politician who just says whatever is on his mind. Unmediated. Crazylike.

“What about the alt-left that came charging at the, as you say, altright? Do they have any semblance of guilt? What about the fact they came charging with clubs in their hands? As far as I’m concerned that was a horrible, horrible day… . I think there’s blame on both sides. I have no doubt about it, you don’t have any doubt about it. If you reported it accurately, you would see.”

Steve Bannon, still waiting in his temporary office in the EOB, thought, *Oh my god, there he goes. I told you so*.

* * *

Outside of the portion of the electorate that, as Trump once claimed, would let him shoot someone on Fifth Avenue, the civilized world was pretty much universally aghast. Everybody came to a dumbfounded moral attention. Anybody in any position of responsibility remotely tied to some idea of establishment respectability had to disavow him. Every CEO of a public company who had associated him- or herself with the Trump White House now needed to cut the ties. The overriding issue might not even be what unreconstructed sentiments he actually seemed to hold in his heart—Bannon averred that Trump was not in fact anti-Semitic, but on the other count he wasn't sure—but that he flat-out couldn't control himself.

In the wake of the immolating news conference, all eyes were suddenly on Kelly—this was his baptism of Trump fire. Spicer, Priebus, Cohn, Powell, Bannon, Tillerson, Mattis, Mnuchin—virtually the entire senior staff and cabinet of the Trump presidency, past and present, had traveled through the stages of adventure, challenge, frustration, battle, self-justification, and doubt, before finally having to confront the very real likelihood that the president they worked for—whose presidency they bore some official responsibility for—didn't have the wherewithal to adequately function in his job. Now, after less than two weeks on the job, it was Kelly's turn to stand at that precipice.

The debate, as Bannon put it, was not about whether the president's situation was bad, but whether it was Twenty-Fifth-Amendment bad.

* * *

To Bannon, if not to Trump, the linchpin of Trumpism was China. The story of the next generation, he believed, had been written, and it was about war with China. Commercial war, trade war, cultural war, diplomatic war—it would be an all-encompassing war that few in the United States now understood needed to be fought, and that almost nobody was prepared to fight.

Bannon had compiled a list of "China hawks" that crossed political lines, going from the Breitbart gang, to former *New Republic* editor Peter Beinart—who regarded Bannon only with scorn—and orthodox liberal-progressive stalwart Robert Kuttner, the editor of the small, public policy magazine *American Prospect*. On Wednesday, August 16, the day after the president's news conference in Trump Tower, Bannon, out of the blue, called Kuttner from his EOB office to talk China.

By this point, Bannon was all but convinced that he was on the way out of the White House. He had received no invitation to join the president in Bedminster, a withering sign. That day, he had learned of the appointment of Hope Hicks as interim communications director—a Jarvanka victory. Meanwhile, the steady whisper from the Jarvanka side continued about his certain demise; it had become a constant background noise.

He was still not sure he would be fired, yet Bannon, in only the second on-the-record interview he had given since the Trump victory, called Kuttner and in effect sealed his fate. He would later maintain that the conversation was not on the record. But this was the Bannon method, in which he merely tempted fate.

If Trump was helplessly Trump in his most recent news conference, Bannon was helplessly Bannon in his chat with Kuttner. He tried to prop up what he made sound like a weak Trump on China. He corrected, in mocking fashion, the president's bluster on North Korea—"ten million people in Seoul" will die, he declared. And he insulted his internal enemies—"they're wetting themselves."

If Trump was incapable of sounding like a president, Bannon had matched him: he was incapable of sounding like a presidential aide.

* * *

That evening, a group of Bannonites gathered near the White House for dinner. The dinner was called for the bar at the Hay-Adams hotel, but Arthur Schwartz, a Bannonite PR man, got into an altercation with the Hay-Adams bartender about switching the television from CNN to Fox, where his client, Blackstone's Stephen Schwarzman, the chairman of one of the president's business councils, was shortly to appear. The business council was hemorrhaging its CEO members after the president's Charlottesville news conference, and Trump, in a tweet, had announced that he was disbanding it. (Schwarzman had advised the president that the council was collapsing and that the president ought to at least make it look as if shutting it down was his decision.)

Schwartz, in high dudgeon, announced that he was checking out of the Hay-Adams and moving to the Trump Hotel. He also insisted that the dinner be moved two blocks away to Joe's, an outpost of Miami's Joe's Stone Crab. Matthew Boyle, the Washington political editor of Breitbart News, was swept into Schwartz's furious departure, with Schwartz upbraiding the twenty-nine-year-old for lighting a cigarette. "I don't know anyone who smokes," he sniffed. Although Schwartz was firmly in the Bannon camp, this seemed to be a general dig at the Breitbart people for being low-class.

Both dedicated Bannonites debated the effect of Bannon's interview, which had caught everybody in the Bannon universe off guard. Neither man could understand why he would have given an interview.

Was Bannon finished?

No, no, no, argued Schwartz. He might have been a few weeks ago when Murdoch had ganged up with McMaster and gone to the president and pressed him to dump Bannon. But then Sheldon had fixed it, Schwartz said.

"Steve stayed home when Abbas came," said Schwartz. "He wasn't going to breathe

the air that a terrorist breathed." This was the precise line Schwartz would hand out to reporters in the coming days in a further effort to establish Bannon's right-wing virtue.

Alexandra Preate, Bannon's lieutenant, arrived at Joe's out of breath. Seconds later, Jason Miller, another PR man in the Bannon fold, arrived. During the transition, Miller had been slated to be the communications director, but then it had come out that Miller had had a relationship with another staff member who announced in a tweet she was pregnant by Miller—as was also, at this point, Miller's wife. Miller, who had lost his promised White House job but continued serving as an outside Trump and Bannon voice, was now, with the recent birth of the child—with the recent birth of both of his children by different women—facing another wave of difficult press. Still, even he was obsessively focused on what Bannon's interview might mean.

By now the table was buzzing with speculation.

How would the president react?

How would Kelly react?

Was this curtains?

For a group of people in touch with Bannon on an almost moment-by-moment basis, it was remarkable that nobody seemed to understand that, forcibly or otherwise, he would surely be moving out of the White House. On the contrary, the damaging interview was, by consensus, converted into a brilliant strategic move. Bannon was not going anywhere—not least because there was no Trump without Bannon.

It was an excited dinner, a revved-up occasion involving a passionate group of people all attached to the man who they believed was the most compelling figure in Washington. They saw him as some sort of irreducible element: Bannon was Bannon was Bannon.

As the evening went on, Matt Boyle got in a furious text-message fight with Jonathan Swan, a White House reporter who had written a story about Bannon being on the losing side in the Bannon-McMaster showdown. Soon almost every well-connected reporter in the city was checking in with somebody at the table. When a text came in, the recipient would hold up his or her phone if it showed a notable reporter's name. At one point, Bannon texted Schwartz some talking points. Could it be that this was just one more day in the endless Trump drama?

Schwartz, who seemed to regard Trump's stupidity as a political given, offered a vigorous analysis of why Trump could not do without Bannon. Then, seeking more proof of his theory, Schwartz said he was texting Sam Nunberg, generally regarded as the man who understood Trump's whims and impulses best, and who had sagely predicted Bannon's survival at each doubtful moment in the past months.

"Nunberg always knows," said Schwartz.

Seconds later, Schwartz looked up. His eyes widened and for a moment he went silent. Then he said: "Nunberg says Bannon's dead."

And, indeed, unbeknownst to the Bannonites, even those closest to him, Bannon was at that moment finalizing his exit with Kelly. By the next day, he would be packing up his little office, and on Monday, when Trump would return to a refurbished West Wing—a paint job, new furniture, and new rugs, its look tilting toward the Trump Hotel—Steve Bannon would be back on Capitol Hill at the Breitbart Embassy, still, he was confident, the chief strategist for the Trump revolution.

EPILOGUE:
BANNON AND TRUMP

On a sweltering morning in October 2017, the man who had more or less single-handedly brought about the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, stood on the steps of the Breitbart town house and said, with a hearty laugh, "I guess global warming is real."

Steve Bannon had lost twenty pounds since his exit from the White House six weeks before—he was on a crash all-sushi diet. "That building," said his friend David Bossie, speaking about all White Houses but especially the Trump White House, "takes perfectly healthy people and turns them into old, unhealthy people." But Bannon, who Bossie had declared on virtual life support during his final days in the West Wing, was again, by his own description, "on fire." He had moved out of the Arlington "safe house" and reestablished himself back at the Breitbart Embassy, turning it into a headquarters for the next stage of the Trump movement, which might not include Trump at all.

Asked about Trump's leadership of the nationalist-populist movement, Bannon registered a not inconsiderable change in the country's political landscape: "I am the leader of the national-populist movement."

One cause of Bannon's boast and new resolve was that Trump, for no reason that Bannon could quite divine, had embraced Mitch McConnell's establishment candidate in the recent Republican run-off in Alabama rather than support the nat-pop choice for the Senate seat vacated by now attorney general Jeff Sessions. After all, McConnell and the president were barely on speaking terms. From his August "working holiday" in Bedminster, the president's staff had tried to organize a makeup meeting with McConnell, but McConnell's staff had sent back word that it wouldn't be possible because the Senate leader would be getting a haircut.

But the president—ever hurt and confused by his inability to get along with the congressional leadership, and then, conversely, enraged by their refusal to get along with him—had gone all-in for the McConnell-backed Luther Strange, who had run against Bannon's candidate, the right-wing firebrand Roy Moore. (Even by Alabama standards, Moore was far right: he had been removed as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court for defying a federal court order to take down a monument of the Ten Commandments in the Alabama judicial building.)

For Bannon, the president's political thinking had been obtuse at best. He was unlikely to get anything from McConnell—and indeed Trump had demanded nothing for his support for Luther Strange, which came via an unplanned tweet in August. Strange's prospects were not only dim, but he was likely to lose in a humiliating fashion. Roy Moore was the clear candidate of the Trump base—and he was Bannon's candidate. Hence, that would be the contest: Trump against Bannon. In fact, the president really didn't have to support anyone—no one would have complained if he'd stayed neutral in a primary race. Or, he could have tacitly supported Strange and not doubled down with more and more insistent tweets.

For Bannon, this episode was not only about the president's continuing and curious confusion about what he represented, but about his mercurial, intemperate, and often cockamamie motivations. Against all political logic, Trump had supported Luther Strange, he told Bannon, because "Luther's my friend."

"He said it like a nine-year-old," said Bannon, recoiling, and noting that there was no universe in which Trump and Strange were actually friends.

For every member of the White House senior staff this would be the lasting conundrum of dealing with President Trump: the "why" of his often baffling behavior.

"The president fundamentally wants to be liked" was Katie Walsh's analysis. "He just fundamentally needs to be liked so badly that it's always … everything is a struggle for him."

This translated into a constant need to win something—anything. Equally important, it was essential that he *look* like a winner. Of course, trying to win without consideration, plan, or clear goals had, in the course of the administration's first nine months, resulted in almost nothing but losses. At the same time, confounding all political logic, that lack of a plan, that impulsivity, that apparent *joie de guerre*, had helped create the disruptiveness that seemed to so joyously shatter the status quo for so many.

But now, Bannon thought, that novelty was finally wearing off.

For Bannon, the Strange-Moore race had been a test of the Trump cult of personality. Certainly Trump continued to believe that people were following *him*, that he was the movement—and that his support was worth 8 to 10 points in any race. Bannon had decided to test this thesis and to do it as dramatically as possible. All told, the Senate Republican leadership and others spent $32 million on Strange's campaign, while Moore's campaign spent $2 million.

Trump, though aware of Strange's deep polling deficit, had agreed to extend his support in a personal trip. But his appearance in Huntsville, Alabama, on September 22, before a Trump-size crowd, was a political flatliner. It was a full-on Trump speech, ninety minutes of rambling and improvisation—the wall would be built (now it was a see-through wall), Russian interference in the U.S. election was a hoax, he would fire anybody on his cabinet who supported Moore. But, while his base turned out en masse, still drawn to Trump the novelty, his cheerleading for Luther Strange drew at best a muted response. As the crowd became restless, the event threatened to become a hopeless embarrassment.

Reading his audience and desperate to find a way out, Trump suddenly threw out a line about Colin Kaepernick taking to his knee while the national anthem played at a National Football League game. The line got a standing ovation. The president thereupon promptly abandoned Luther Strange for the rest of the speech. Likewise, for the next week he continued to whip the NFL. Pay no attention to Strange's resounding defeat five days after the event in Huntsville. Ignore the size and scale of Trump's rejection and the Moore-Bannon triumph, with its hint of new disruptions to come. Now Trump had a new topic, and a winning one: the Knee.

* * *

The fundamental premise of nearly everybody who joined the Trump White House was, *This can work. We can help make this work.* Now, only three-quarters of the way through just the first year of Trump's term, there was literally not one member of the senior staff who could any longer be confident of that premise. Arguably—and on many days indubitably—most members of the senior staff believed that the sole upside of being part of the Trump White House was to help prevent worse from happening.

In early October, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's fate was sealed—if his obvious ambivalence toward the president had not already sealed it—by the revelation that he had called the president "a fucking moron."

This—insulting Donald Trump's intelligence—was both the thing you could not do and the thing—drawing there-but-for-the-grace-of-God guffaws across the senior staff—that everybody was guilty of. Everyone, in his or her own way, struggled to express the baldly obvious fact that the president did not know enough, did not know what he didn't know, did not particularly care, and, to boot, was confident if not serene in his unquestioned certitudes. There was now a fair amount of back-of-the-classroom giggling about who had called Trump what. For Steve Mnuchin and Reince Priebus, he was an "idiot." For Gary Cohn, he was "dumb as shit." For H. R. McMaster he was a "dope." The list went on.

Tillerson would merely become yet another example of a subordinate who believed that his own abilities could somehow compensate for Trump's failings.

Aligned with Tillerson were the three generals, Mattis, McMasters, and Kelly, each seeing themselves as representing maturity, stability, and restraint. And each, of course, was resented by Trump for it. The suggestion that any or all of these men might be more focused and even tempered than Trump himself was cause for sulking and tantrums on the president's part.

The daily discussion among senior staffers, those still there and those now gone—all of whom had written off Tillerson's future in the Trump administration—was how long General Kelly would last as chief of staff. There was something of a virtual office pool, and the joke was that Reince Priebus was likely to be Trump's longest-serving chief of staff. Kelly's distaste for the president was open knowledge—in his every word and gesture he condescended to Trump—the president's distaste for Kelly even more so. It was sport for the president to defy Kelly, who had become the one thing in his life he had never been able to abide: a disapproving and censorious father figure.

* * *

There really were no illusions at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Kelly's long-suffering antipathy toward the president was rivaled only by his scorn for the president's family—"Kushner," he pronounced, was "insubordinate." Cohn's derisive contempt for Kushner as well as the president was even greater. In return, the president heaped more abuse on Cohn—the former president of Goldman Sachs was now a "complete idiot, dumber than dumb." In fact, the president had also stopped defending his own family, wondering when they would "take the hint and go home."

But, of course, this was still politics: those who could overcome shame or disbelief—and, despite all Trumpian coarseness and absurdity, suck up to him and humor him—might achieve unique political advantage. As it happened, few could.

By October, however, many on the president's staff took particular notice of one of the few remaining Trump opportunists: Nikki Haley, the UN ambassador. Haley—"as ambitious as Lucifer," in the characterization of one member of the senior staff—had concluded that Trump's tenure would last, at best, a single term, and that she, with requisite submission, could be his heir apparent. Haley had courted and befriended Ivanka, and Ivanka had brought her into the family circle, where she had become a particular focus of Trump's attention, and he of hers. Haley, as had become increasingly evident to the wider foreign policy and national security team, was the family's pick for secretary of state after Rex Tillerson's inevitable resignation. (Likewise, in this shuffle, Dina Powell would replace Haley at the UN.)

The president had been spending a notable amount of private time with Haley on Air Force One and was seen to be grooming her for a national political future. Haley, who was much more of a traditional Republican, one with a pronounced moderate streak—a type increasingly known as a Jarvanka Republican—was, evident to many, being mentored in Trumpian ways. The danger here, offered one senior Trumper, "is that she is so much smarter than him."

What now existed, even before the end of the president's first year, was an effective power vacuum. The president, in his failure to move beyond daily chaos, had hardly seized the day. But, as sure as politics, someone would.

In that sense, the Trumpian and Republican future was already moving beyond this White House. There was Bannon, working from the outside and trying to take over the Trump movement. There was the Republican leadership in Congress, trying to stymie Trumpism—if not slay it. There was John McCain, doing his best to embarrass it. There was the special counsel's office, pursuing the president and many of those around him.

The stakes were very clear to Bannon. Haley, quite an un-Trumpian figure, but by far the closest of any of his cabinet members to him, might, with clever political wiles, entice Trump to hand her the Trumpian revolution. Indeed, fearing Haley's hold on the president, Bannon's side had—the very morning that Bannon had stood on the steps of the Breitbart town house in the unseasonable October weather—gone into overdrive to push the CIA's Mike Pompeo for State after Tillerson's departure.

This was all part of the next stage of Trumpism—to protect it from Trump.

* * *

General Kelly was conscientiously and grimly trying to purge the West Wing chaos. He had begun by compartmentalizing the sources and nature of the chaos. The overriding source, of course, was the president's own eruptions, which Kelly could not control and had resigned himself to accepting. As for the ancillary chaos, much of it had been calmed by the elimination of Bannon, Priebus, Scaramucci, and Spicer, with the effect of making it quite a Jarvanka-controlled West Wing.

Now, nine months in, the administration faced the additional problem that it was very hard to hire anyone of stature to replace the senior people who had departed. And the stature of those who remained seemed to be more diminutive by the week.

Hope Hicks, at twenty-eight, and Stephen Miller, at thirty-two, both of whom had begun as effective interns on the campaign, were now among the seniormost figures in the White House. Hicks had assumed command of the communications operation, and Miller had effectively replaced Bannon as the senior political strategist.

After the Scaramucci fiasco, and the realization that the position of communications director would be vastly harder to fill, Hicks was assigned the job as the "interim" director. She was given the interim title partly because it seemed implausible that she was qualified to run an already battered messaging operation, and partly because if she *was* given the permanent job everyone would assume that the president was effectively calling the daily shots. But by the middle of September, interim was quietly converted to permanent.

In the larger media and political world, Miller—who Bannon referred to as "my typist"—was a figure of ever increasing incredulity. He could hardly be taken out in public without engaging in some screwball, if not screeching, fit of denunciation and grievance.

He was the de facto crafter of policy and speeches, and yet up until now he had largely only taken dictation.

Most problematic of all, Hicks and Miller, along with everyone on the Jarvanka side, were now directly connected to actions involved in the Russian investigation or efforts to spin it, deflect it, or, indeed, cover it up. Miller and Hicks had drafted—or at least typed—Kushner's version of the first letter written at Bedminster to fire Comey. Hicks had joined with Kushner and his wife to draft on Air Force One the Trump-directed press release about Don Jr. and Kushner's meeting with the Russians in Trump Tower.

In its way, this had become the defining issue for the White House staff: who had been in what inopportune room. And even beyond the general chaos, the constant legal danger formed part of the high barrier to getting people to come work in the West Wing.

Kushner and his wife—now largely regarded as a time bomb inside the White House—were spending considerable time on their own defense and battling a sense of mounting paranoia, not least about what members of the senior staff who had already exited the West Wing might now say about them. Kushner, in the middle of October, would, curiously, add to his legal team Charles Harder, the libel lawyer who had defended both Hulk Hogan in his libel suit against Gawker, the Internet gossip site, and Melania Trump in her suit against the *Daily Mail*. The implied threat to media and to critics was clear. Talk about Jared Kushner at your peril. It also likely meant that Donald Trump was yet managing the White House's legal defense, slotting in his favorite "tough guy" lawyers.

Beyond Donald Trump's own daily antics, here was the consuming issue of the White House: the ongoing investigation directed by Robert Mueller. The father, the daughter, the son-in-law, his father, the extended family exposure, the prosecutor, the retainers looking to save their own skins, the staffers who Trump had rewarded with the back of his hand—it all threatened, in Bannon's view, to make Shakespeare look like Dr. Seuss.

Everyone waited for the dominoes to fall, and to see how the president, in his fury, might react and change the game again.

* * *

Steve Bannon was telling people he thought there was a 33.3 percent chance that the Mueller investigation would lead to the impeachment of the president, a 33.3 percent chance that Trump would resign, perhaps in the wake of a threat by the cabinet to act on the Twenty-Fifth Amendment (by which the cabinet can remove the president in the event of his incapacitation), and a 33.3 percent chance that he would limp to the end of his term. In any event, there would certainly not be a second term, or even an attempt at one.

"He's not going to make it," said Bannon at the Breitbart Embassy. "He's lost his stuff."

Less volubly, Bannon was telling people something else: he, Steve Bannon, was going to run for president in 2020. The locution, "If I were president …" was turning into, "When I am president …"

The top Trump donors from 2016 were in his camp, Bannon claimed: Sheldon Adelson, the Mercers, Bernie Marcus, and Peter Thiel. In short order, and as though he had been preparing for this move for some time, Bannon had left the White House and quickly thrown together a rump campaign organization. The heretofore behind-the-scenes Bannon was methodically meeting with every conservative leader in the country—doing his best, as he put it, to "kiss the ass and pay homage to all the gray-beards." And he was keynoting a list of must-attend conservative events.

"Why is Steve speaking? I didn't know he spoke," the president remarked with puzzlement and rising worry to aides.

Trump had been upstaged in other ways as well. He had been scheduled for a major *60 Minutes* interview in September, but this was abruptly canceled after Bannon's *60 Minutes* interview with Charlie Rose on September 11. The president's advisers felt he shouldn't put himself in a position where he would be compared with Bannon. The worry among staffers—all of them concerned that Trump's rambling and his alarming repetitions (the same sentences delivered with the same expressions minutes apart) had significantly increased, and that his ability to stay focused, never great, had notably declined—was that he was likely to suffer by such a comparison. Instead, the interview with Trump was offered to Sean Hannity—with a preview of the questions.

Bannon was also taking the Breitbart opposition research group—the same forensic accountant types who had put together the damning *Clinton Cash* revelations—and focusing it on what he characterized as the "political elites." This was a catchall list of enemies that included as many Republicans as Democrats.

Most of all, Bannon was focused on fielding candidates for 2018. While the president had repeatedly threatened to support primary challenges against his enemies, in the end, with his aggressive head start, it was Bannon who would be leading these challenges. It was Bannon spreading fear in the Republican Party, not Trump. Indeed, Bannon was willing to pick outré if not whacky candidates—including former Staten Island congressman Michael Grimm, who had done a stint in federal prison—to demonstrate, as he had demonstrated with Trump, the scale, artfulness, and menace of Bannon-style politics. Although the Republicans in the 2018 congressional races were looking, according to Bannon's numbers, at a 15-point deficit, it was Bannon's belief that the more extreme the right-wing challenge appeared, the more likely the Democrats would field left-wing nutters even less electable than right-wing nutters. The disruption had just begun.

Trump, in Bannon's view, was a chapter, or even a detour, in the Trump revolution, which had always been about weaknesses in the two major parties. The Trump presidency

—however long it lasted—had created the opening that would provide the true outsiders their opportunity. Trump was just the beginning.

Standing on the Breitbart steps that October morning, Bannon smiled and said: “It’s going to be wild as shit.”

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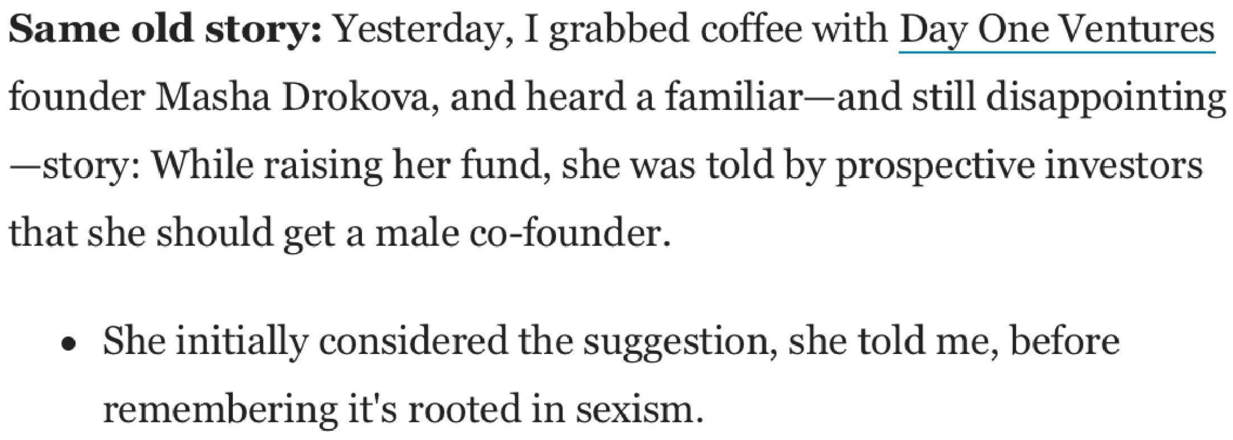
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHAEL WOLFF has received numerous awards for his work, including two National Magazine Awards. He has been a regular columnist for *Vanity Fair, New York, The Hollywood Reporter*, British *GQ, USA Today*, and *The Guardian*. He is the author of six prior books, including the bestselling *Burn Rate* and *The Man Who Owns the News*. He lives in Manhattan and has four children.

From: Steven Sinofsky [redacted]
Sent: 2/21/2018 5:48:07 PM
To: Jeffrey Epstein [jeevacation@gmail.com]
Subject: Fwd: Pro Rata: Wednesday, February 21
Attachments: image1.png

Importance: High

Excerpt from below...



Same old story: Yesterday, I grabbed coffee with Day One Ventures founder Masha Drokova, and heard a familiar—and still disappointing—story: While raising her fund, she was told by prospective investors that she should get a male co-founder.

- She initially considered the suggestion, she told me, before remembering it's rooted in sexism.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Kia Kokalitcheva <[redacted]>
Date: February 21, 2018 at 7:32:17 AM PST
To:[redacted]
Subject: Pro Rata: Wednesday, February 21

View in browser

Pro Rata

By Kia Kokalitcheva ·Feb 21, 2018

Welcome back, readers. Once again, a reminder to send me your delicious scoops and tips at kia@axios.com or find me on Twitter at @imkialikethecar.

Hot event alert: RSVP to our 2/26 event in NYC for interviews with NBA star Draymond Green, BBG Ventures' Susan Lyne, JPMorgan's Jennifer Piepszak, and Equinox CEO Harvey Spevak.

Top of the Morning

Illustration: Rebecca Zisser / Axios

AT&T's proposed $85 billion purchase of Time Warner took another turn yesterday. A federal judge hearing the Justice Department's lawsuit to block the deal denied a request by the telecom giant to disclose communications between Justice Department officials, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and the White House about the deal.

- **Why it matters:** The ruling is a blow to AT&T's attempt to show that the lawsuit to block the deal is politically motivated by President Trump's antipathy for CNN, which Time Warner owns. AT&T says it wasn't asked to offload any assets as part of the deal until after Trump took office.
- **What they're saying:** “We respect the judge’s decision and look forward to the upcoming trial,” said Dan Petrocelli, who is leading AT&T and Time Warner's defense in the case, in a statement.
- **At a hearing on Friday,** a Justice Department lawyer said that AT&T's argument for the documents "didn't make sense."
- **Go deeper:** Our report from the courtroom on Friday, when DOJ and AT&T presented their arguments.

Fund scoop: Niv Dror, who joined AngelList through its acquisition of Product Hunt in 2016, is raising a small early-stage fund focused on consumer products, multiple sources tell Axios. Dror declined to comment.

- The fund will raise at least $1 million, though one source says it could go up to $2-3 million.
- Like Product Hunt colleague Ryan Hoover’s own VC fund, Dror’s will be managed on the back-end by AngelList.

Same old story: Yesterday, I grabbed coffee with Day One Ventures founder Masha Drokova, and heard a familiar—and still disappointing—story: While raising her fund, she was told by prospective investors that she should get a male co-founder.

- She initially considered the suggestion, she told me, before remembering it's rooted in sexism.

Softbank $$$: Softbank’s Vision Fund is in early talks to raise additional funds from Bahrain’s sovereign wealth fund, Mumtalakat, the latter’s CEO told Reuters.

- The Persian Gulf has been a major source of funds for the Vision Fund: Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia’s main sovereign wealth fund, and Abu Dhabi’s Mubadala, are already investors.
- And it’s not the only one visiting the region’s investors—funds focused on tokens and cryptocurrencies have also been fundraising in the area, I’m told.

Unicorn stampede: We’re not even two months into 2018 and yet, seven startups have already seen their private valuations cross the $1 billion mark—earning “unicorn” status—according to Pitchbook. Last year: 53. The word “overvalued” comes to mind...

The BFD

Photo: George Rose/Getty Images

Broadcom has adjusted its takeover offer for Qualcomm to $79 per share, down from the its “best and final” bid of $82. The move is a response to Qualcomm's announcement yesterday it would pay $127.50 a share for NXP, up from the $110 it had offered.

- **Why it's the BFD:** Broadcom and Qualcomm's takeover dance has taken a dramatic turn for what should have been a boring transaction between two chip companies.
- **Bottom line:** "Broadcom has long said its acquisition of the San Diego-based chipmaker is contingent on Qualcomm buying NXP at the previously agreed price, saving a large amount of cash Broadcom could hypothetically use for its own purposes once the acquisition goes through... Qualcomm raised its NXP bid to secure support from activist investors who have piled into NXP and demanded a higher sale price." — Bloomberg.

Venture Capital Deals

• **Moovit**, an Israeli maker of a transportation app, has raised $50 million in Series D funding led by **Intel Capital**, with participation from Sequoia, BMW iVentures, NGP, Sound Ventures, BRM, Gemini, Vaizra, Vintage, and Hanaco. http://axios.link/fQSW

• **Vectra**, a San Jose, Calif.-based cybersecurity startup, has raised $36 million in Series D funding led by **Atlantic Bridge**, with participation from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, Nissho Electronics Corp., Khosla Ventures, Accel Partners, IA Ventures, AME Cloud Ventures, DAG Ventures and Wipro Ventures. www.vectra.ai

• **FourKites**, a Chicago-based make of supply chain management software, has raised $35 million in Series B funding. **August Capital** led the round, with participation from Bain Capital Ventures and Hyde Park Venture Partners. http://axios.link/7XWI

• **DecaWave**, an Irish fabless semiconductor company, has raised $30 million in funding led by **Atlantic Bridge Ventures**, with participation from the China Ireland Growth Technology Fund, ACT Venture Capital, and ZZ Ventures.

• **Kidaptiv**, a Mountain View, Calif.-based maker of adaptive learning software, has raised $19.1 million in Series C funding led by **Formation 8** and Korean education company **Woongjin ThinkBig**. http://axios.link/Fuut

• **Prophesee**, a Paris-based machine vision startup, has raised $19 million in Series B funding led by an undisclosed investor, with participation from 360 Capital Partners, Supernova Invest, iBionext, Intel Capital, Renault Group, and Robert Bosch Venture Capital, according to Tech.eu. http://axios.link/QAyn

• **Greenlight Financial Technology**, an Atlanta-based maker of a smart debit card for kids, teens, and college students, has raised $16 million in Series A funding led by TTV Capital with participation from New Enterprise Associates, Relay Ventures, SunTrust Bank, Ally Financial, nbkc bank, Canapi, and the Amazon Alexa Fund. www.greenlightcard.com

• **Zagster**, a Cambridge, Mass.-based bike-share service, has raised $15 million in new funding led by **Edison Capital Partners**. www.zagster.com

• **Morphisec**, and Israel-based cybersecurity startup, has raised $12 million in Series B funding from Orange Digital Ventures, Jerusalem Venture Partners, General Electric, and Deutsche Telekom. www.morphisec.com

• **Tunity**, a New York-based live audio service for television content, has raised $12 million in Series A funding. Investors include former Morgan Stanley CEO John Mack and WeWork CEO Adam Neumann. www.tunity.com

• **Fever Labs**, a New York-based maker of an event discovery app, has raised $11.7 million in new funding, according to an SEC filing. www.feverup.com

- **Gabi**, a San Francisco-based insurance shopping services, has raised $9.5 million in Series A funding led by **Canvas Ventures**, with participation from Correlation Ventures, Northwestern Mutual Future Ventures, Securian Ventures, A.Capital Ventures and Project A. www.gabi.com
- **Dover Microsystems**, a Waltham, Mass.-based cybersecurity company, has raised $6 million in seed funding. **Hyperplane Venture Capital** led the round with participation from **Draper, Qualcomm Ventures** and the **Hub Angels Investment Group.** www.dovermicrosystems.com
- **Anyfin**, a Stockholm-based loan refinancing startup, has raised $5.9 million (€4.8 million) in Series A funding led by **Accel** and **Northzone**, with participation from Global Founders Capital and angel investors. http://axios.link/IpTj
- **Thirdpresence**, a Helsinkin-based A.I. programmatic video advertising company, has raised $2.4 million in seed funding from Inventure, Tesi, and existing investors. www.thirdpresence.com

Private Equity Deals

- **Rhone Capital** agreed to buy **Fogo de Chão** (NASDAQ: FOGO), a Dallas-based Brazilian steakhouse chain, in a deal valued at $560 million. Credit Suisse and Wells Fargo Bank, National Association provided financing. www.fogodechao.com
- **Behrman Capital** has acquired **Corfin Industries**, a Salem, N.H.-based provider of microelectronic component preparation services. www.corfin.com

🚑**Water Street Healthcare Partners** and **JLL Partners** have agreed to acquire **Dohmen Life Science Services**, a Milwaukee-based provider of operations services to biopharma and medical device companies, from The Dohmen Company. www.dlss.com

- **PWP Growth Equity** and **RedHawk Investment** have invested an undisclosed amount into **360Training**, an Austin, Texas-based provider of online training courses for regulated industries. www.360training.com
- **Orient Hontai Capital**, a Chinese private equity firm, has agreed to buy a 53.5% stake in **Imagina Media Audiovisual**, a Spanish media company, valuing the target company at an enterprise value of €1.9 billion (US$2.34 billion). http://axios.link/CN5I
- **Leeds Equity Partners** is investing in **Endeavor Schools**, a Miami-based owner and operator of 37 private K-12 schools in the U.S. www.endeavorschools.com
- **Cathay Capital MidCap Fund** is buying a majority of stake in **E. WINKEMANN**, a German auto supplier. Financial terms weren’t announced.

Equistone Partners Europe will retain a stake along with company management. www.winkemann.de

Public Offerings

- **Deutsche Bank** (NYSE: DB) plans to debut an IPO of its asset-management arm, DWS, for Monday next week, according to Reuters. It could list on the Frankfurt exchange as early as March 19. Deutsche Bank is planning to offer 25% of existing DWS shares for an expected 1.5 billion to €2 billion ($1.85 billion to $2.47 billion). http://axios.link/KNnd
- **Opes Acquisition**, a Mexico-based blank check company formed by Axis Capital Management to acquire a Mexican business, has filed for an $100 million IPO. It will offer 10 million units at a price of $10. At that price, Opes Acquisition would command a market value of $129 million. Each unit consists of one share of common stock and one warrant exercisable at $11.50. It plans to list on the Nasdaq under the symbol OPESU, with EarlyBirdCapital is the sole bookrunner on the deal. www.axiscapital.com.mx/eng
- **Tiberius Acquisition**, a Metairie, La.-based blank check company formed to acquire a middle-market insurance business, filed for a $150 million IPO. It will offer 15 million units at a price of $10. At that price, Tiberius Acquisition would command a market value of $188 million. Each unit consists of one share of common stock and one warrant to purchase one share of common stock. It plans to list on the Nasdaq under the symbol TIBRU, with Cantor Fitzgerald and Dowling & Partners are the joint bookrunners on the deal.

Liquidity Events

- **Xerox Corp** shareholders Carl Icahn and Darwin Deason said Tuesday that the company should sell itself to one of its rivals or a private equity firm, opposing a potential deal with Fujifilm, according to Reuters. http://axios.link/jtPN

More M&A

- **S&P Global** (NYSE: SPGI), a provider or markets data and analytics, has agreed to set to acquire **Panjiva**, a New York-based provider of supply chain data. www.panjiva.com
- **The Adecco Group**, a Swiss human resources services firm, has acquired **Vettery**, a New York-based recruiting startup, for just over $100 million, according to TechCrunch. http://axios.link/hBcz
- **Oracle** has acquired **Zenedge**, an Aventura, Fla.-based cybersecurity solutions provider. www.zenedge.com
- **Bosch** has acquired **Splitting Fares**, a Detroit-based startup that provides ride-sharing platforms. www.splt.io

Fundraising

- **EQT** is seeking 10.75 billion euros ($13.2 billion) for a new buyout fund, according to the Financial Times.
- **TechOperators Venture Capital**, an Atlanta-based venture capital firm, has raised $40.2 million toward a $100 million third venture fund, according to an SEC filing. www.techoperators.com

It's Personnel

- **Amy Errett** has joined **True Ventures** as a venture partner. Erret will remain CEO of Madison Reed, a San Francisco-based hair color company. http://axios.link/r9h8
- **Jeff Schumacher** is stepping down as CEO of **BCG Digital Ventures** and will become non-executive chairman of the firm. www.bcgdv.com

- **Nicholas Leiby** has joined **Weinberg Capital Group** as director. He was previously vice president at Resilience Capital Partners. www.weinbergcap.com

Final Numbers

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THE SNOWDEN AFFAIR

A Spy Story in Six Parts

By Edward Jay Epstein

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Bibiography [TK]

Chronology 1: Snowden Thriller:

From Honolulu to Moscow in 82 Days.

April 8, 2013, Honolulu. Edward Snowden begins working as an infrastructure-analyst in training at the National Threat Operations Center for outside contractor Booz Allen Hamilton.

June 5, 2013, London The Guardian publishes a classified document revealing that the National Security Agency has secretly been gathering the telephone billing records of millions of American. The Washington Post then publishing other secret documents revealing that the NSA has been intercepting data from the Internet.

June 9, 2013, Hong Kong. In a 12-minute long video posted on the website of the Guardian, Edward Snowden reveals himself as the source for the document published by the Guardian and the Washington Post

June 11 Hong Kong. Sarah Harrison arrives in Hong Kong to work behind-the-scenes to assist Snowden.

June 14, 2013, Washington D.C. Federal prosecutors in the Eastern District of Virginia, file a three-count criminal complaint against Snowden charging him with theft of government documents, unauthorized communication of national defense information and the willful communication of classified communications intelligence information to an unauthorized person.

June 23, 2013, Moscow. Snowden arrived from Hong Kong at Sheremetyevo International Airport.

PROLOGUE

On The Snowden Trail: Hong Kong 2014

The National Security Agency, or, as it now commonly called, the NSA, was created on October 24, 1952, in such a tight cocoon of secrecy that even the Presidential order creating it was classified “Top Secret.” When journalists asked questions about this new agency, Washington officials jokingly told them that the initials NSA stood for “No Such Agency.” The reason for this extraordinary stealth is that the NSA is involved in a very sensitive enterprise. Its job is to intercept, decode and analyze foreign electronic communications transmitted around the globe over from copper wires, fiber optic cable, satellite, microwave relays, cell phone towers, wireless transmissions and the Internet for intelligence purposes. In intelligence jargon, its product is called COMINT. This form of intelligence-gathering is particularly effective when the NSA’s targets are unaware of the state-of-the-art tools the NSA uses to break into their computers and telecommunications and decipher their enciphered messages.

In the first week of June in 2013, the NSA learned that a huge number of its most secret files had been stolen. The suspect was Edward Snowden, a 29 year old civilian analyst at the NSA’s regional base in Oahu, Hawaii, who had fled to Hong Kong. The stolen documents revealed, among other things, the secret tools and capabilities that the NSA employed to do its job. According to a three-count criminal complaint filed by Federal prosecutors in the Eastern District of Virginia, Snowden had stolen government documents and violated the Espionage Act by the unauthorized and willful communication of national defense information to an unauthorized person.

This was not a who-dunn-it mystery. On June 9th, 2013, in an extraordinary 12-minute video made in a cramped hotel room in Hong Kong, Snowden identified himself as the person who had taken the NSA documents. Watching the video, the world saw a shy, awkward and sympathetic-looking, man wearing a rumpled shirt, rimless glasses and a computer geek-style haircut, passionately speaking out against the NSA’s violations of the law and, in a shaky voice, expressing his willingness to expose them.

Snowden had an innocent, idealistic, principled look about him, and the world was ready to congratulate him for revealing the NSA's illegal collection of data inside the United States. But in fact, he stole a great deal more than documents relating to domestic surveillance. He had also stolen secret documents from the NSA revealing the sources and methods it employed in its monitoring of foreign adversaries.

What made this theft even more extraordinary was that he got away with it. By the time it had been discovered in the first week of June 2013, it was not possible for the FBI, the Grand Jury or any other US agency to question him because he had fled the country. He went first to Hong Kong. Although it is economically autonomous, the city of 7.2 million is actually a special administrative zone of China, whose national security apparatus is ultimately controlled by Beijing. Making the possibility of questioning him even more remote, he next went to Russia, a country which has no extradition treaty with the United States. And Russia granted him asylum. His escape left in its wake an incredibly-important unsolved mystery: how did a young analyst at the NSA succeeded in penetrating all the layers of NSA security to pull off the largest theft of secret documents in the history of American intelligence? Did he act alone? What happened to documents? Was his arrival in Russia part of the plan?

As I had written several books on the vulnerability of intelligence services, this was a mystery-- a "how-dunnit" if you like-- that immediately intrigued me. After all, even if the perpetrator had acted for the most salutary of reasons, the unauthorized transfer of state secrets to another country is, by any definition, a form of espionage.

I decided to begin my investigation of this case in Hong Kong because it was the place to which Snowden first fled after leaving Hawaii. Snowden had planned the trip for at least 4 weeks, according to the travel plan he had filed at the NSA, I assumed he had a good reason for going first to Hong Kong. But when I spoke to my sources in the intelligence community, they could not explain Snowden's choice of this semi-autonomous zone in China as his initial destination. It would not protect him from the reach of US law since Hong Kong had an active extradition treaty with the United States. Just a few months earlier, Hong Kong had made headlines by extraditing Trent Martin, a fugitive wanted in America for insider-trading, who was arrested in Hong Kong following an American request to detain him. Martin was then sent back to the United States to stand trial.

Nor was Hong Kong particularly convenient to Hawaii. There were no non-stop flights to it from Honolulu. Snowden's flight took 8 hours and ten minutes just to Narita airport, Japan, where he had to change planes. After a three hour wait at the airport, it took him five more hours to fly to Hong Kong. Moreover, at the time he departed Honolulu, Snowden had not yet arranged for any journalists to meet him in Hong Kong and, as far as US intelligence could determine, he had no known appointments there. Even so, Snowden carried the digital copies he had made of the top-secret NSA documents to Hong Kong. General Michael Hayden, who served both as the head of the NSA and the CIA, told me. "It's very mysterious why Snowden chose Hong Kong." Whatever reason he had for flying to Hong Kong, we can assume it was compelling enough for him to take the risk that he would be arrested there after US authorities discovered the theft and invoked the detention provision of its extradition treaty with Hong Kong. It was possible that Snowden travelled there to see someone other than a journalist. But who?

Using my frequent travel miles, I bought a ticket on Japan Air Lines to Hong Kong. The route, like that of Snowden's route the previous year, had a stop-over in Narita Airport in Japan (where, according to an intelligence source, Snowden was caught on the CCTV cameras waiting in the transit lounge for his connection to the four and one half flight to Hong Kong).

I arrived in Hong Kong on May 20th 2014– the same day that Snowden had arrived there the previous year. I checked into the five-star Mira Hotel. It was in the Tsim Sha Tsui shopping district of Kowloon, a 10-minute ferry ride away from Hong Kong island, where most of the foreign consulates are located.

I chose the Mira because it was the hotel in which Snowden stayed and made the celebrated video admitting his role in taking the NSA documents. I asked at the front desk for room 1014, the same one that Snowden had occupied in 2013. Snowden had told the journalists from the *Guardian* that that he had been at Mira Hotel since he first arrived in Hong Kong on May 20th until he left on June 10th. My motive in taking the room during that period was not journalistic nostalgia; I wanted access to the hotel's service and security personnel who may have had contact with Snowden a year earlier. Unfortunately, that room was occupied. Even so, I was given a nearby room that served my purpose. The rate was $330 a day with taxes, although I received a journalist's discount of 30 percent.

My first surprise was that Snowden had not arrived at the Mira until 11 days after he arrived in Hong Kong. He told the *Guardian* reporters that he hid out at the Mira hotel since his arrival because he feared that he might be captured by the CIA. But, as I learned from the hotel staff, Snowden had actually registered there under his real name and used his own passport and credit card to secure the room. Even more surprising was the date he checked into the Mira Hotel. It was not May 20th but June 1, 2013. Since he checked out on June 10, 2013, he was there for only nine days.

The question that could not be answered by the registry of the Mira Hotel was: where was Snowden staying for the eleven days between from May 20th to June 1? Wherever he was, he apparently considered himself safe enough to take another irrevocable step in his defection. He sent journalist Glenn Greenwald of the *Guardian* a "welcome package," as he called it, of 20 top-secret NSA documents on May 25, 2013. He had now not only downloaded documents but, in a violation of his oath, he provided them to an unauthorized party. He also in Hong Kong, for the first time, directly contacted via email Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post.* Indeed, it was during these first 11 days during which he was staying someplace other than the place he claimed to be staying that he made almost all the arrangements for his journalistic event. He was also apparently in contact with at least one foreign mission during this period, according to what he written to Gellman on May 25th. In that email concerning when and how his story was to be published by the *Washington Post,* Snowden even asked Gellman to include in it some text that would help him with this mission. But which country was he approaching? Clearly his whereabouts during these missing 11 days was a gap that needed to be filled in. It could shed light on why he came to Hong Kong.

I next called Keith Bradsher, a prize-winning journalist who had been the *New York Times* bureau chief in Hong Kong in 2013, who had written a well-researched report about Snowden's arrival in Hong Kong in 2013.. He proposed we meet at the Foreign Correspondent's Club on top of Ice House Street in central Hong Kong, a venue, I recalled, reminiscent of where John LeCarre had set the opening chapter of his spy novel *The Honourable Schoolboy*. When we spoke later, Bradsher told me that he knew Albert Ho, who had been retained as Snowden's lawyer, for more than a decade, and interviewed him many times as he was a leader of a political movement in Hong Kong. Bradsher said that a few days after Snowden had revealed himself on June 9th, 2013, he met with Ho and questioned him on the very question that intrigued me about Snowden's unknown whereabouts. Ho told Bradsher that all of Snowden's logistics had been arranged for him by an intermediary, who Ho called a "carer." Ho further said that Snowden had been in contact with the "carer" prior to his arrival in Hong Kong on May 20th. According to Ho, it was this person who had arranged accommodations for Snowden on his arrival—and afterwards. If so, it seemed plausible to me that this person might be able to shed light on whom, if anyone, Snowden saw in his first ii days in Hong Kong. Of course, this person may have been unaware of the reasons for Snowden's escape to Hong Kong when he made the arrangements for him but he was the best lead I had to learning why Snowden had come to Hong Kong. But who was the "carer?" Bradsher told me that he pressed Ho for details about this mystery person over the course of several meeting but Ho would not identify him beyond saying, that he was a "well-connected "resident" of Hong Kong.

I next called Ho's law office in Hong Kong. But Ho politely declined to be interviewed by me, saying he had said all he was going to say about the Snowden case. I next made an appointment with Robert Tibbo, a Canadian-born barrister, specializing in civil liberties cases, who had worked closely with Ho on the Snowden case. He immediately agreed to see me.

I met Tibbo in the tea room at the Mandarin Oriental hotel on Hong Kong Island, where I moved to from the Mira hotel. The Mandarin was also convenient to Tibbo's office at the court.

Tibbo was a tall, round-faced man, with thinning hair, in his early fifties. He talked freely about his remarkable career. After earning a degree in chemical engineering from McGill University, and working in Asia as an engineer for a decade, he went to law school in New Zealand, and then became a barrister in Hong Kong specializing in cases involving the legal status of refugees. Over a leisurely tea, Tibbo made it clear to me that he had played a far more active role than Ho in the Snowden case, even personally escorting Snowden from the Mira Hotel on June 10th to a safe house. He did not dispute what Ho had told Bradsher, but said that he was himself bound by lawyer-client privilege which prevented him from providing me with any details that might reveal the identity of the person who had made arrangements for Snowden. When I asked the date that he was officially retained by Snowden, he said that Snowden had signed an agreement hiring Ho's law firm as his legal adviser on June 10, 2013 (which was a matter of public record.) "I understand that," I said, "but I am inquiring about something that had happened before you became his legal adviser." He shook his head, as if getting rid of a pesky fly, and said that his oath precluded him saying anything at all that might do damage to the credibility of his client. “Not even where he was staying in May in Hong Kong,” I persisted. He leaned forward and, after a brief hesitation, said, jokingly I assumed that he would not divulge that information “even if you held a gun to my head.” We met two more times but, true to his word, Tibbo would not say if he even knew the identity of the “carer.”

Meanwhile, Joyce Xu, a very resourceful Chinese journalist who was assisting me in Hong Kong, had filed the equivalent of a Freedom of Information request with the Hong Kong Security Bureau asking for information about Snowden’s movements in May. Thomas Ng, the Secretary for Security, turned down the request, adding that Hong Kong authorities do not keep records of hotel registrations. So I ran into a dead end on the issue of Snowden's “carer” and his whereabouts for those eleven crucial days with the Hong Kong authorities.

At this point, I had some much-needed help from an old friend on the White House staff. Before I had left New York, I asked him if he could find someone at the consulate in Hong Kong who might brief me on the Snowden case. I didn’t hear from him until just a few days before I was due to return to New York. He had managed to put me in touch with a former employee of the consulate, who he said was “fully informed” about the efforts of the US mission to locate Snowden in Hong Kong. This person was still living in Hong Kong and he agreed to meet with me on condition that I did not mention either his name or his position in the US mission in Hong Kong. The venue was the terrace lounge of the American Club in Exchange Square in central Hong Kong, a posh club mainly for expatriate Americans. It was on the 48th floor with a spectacular view of Victoria Harbor. Once there, I had no problem finding my source. He was, as he had described himself, a large man with short-cropped brown hair wearing a brightly-striped tie. He was sitting alone at a discreet table in the corner. I introduced myself and gave him a copy of my latest book, *The Annals of Unsolved Crime*.

After ordering drinks, he told me in a soft voice about the American reaction to Snowden’s revelations in Hong Kong. “All hell broke loose,” he said, describing the atmosphere at the US mission after Snowden’s video was posted on the *Guardian’s* website on June 9th, 2013. To break the ice, I went over some of the assertions Snowden had made concerning the US consulate in that extraordinary video. For example, Snowden had said that he could be seized at any moment by a CIA rendition team based at the US consulate “just down the road” from the Mira Hotel. “Was that true,” I asked? He rolled his eyes, and said, “Snowden has a pretty wild imagination. For one thing, the US consulate is not down the road from the Mira in Kowloon, it is here on Hong Kong Island. And there was no CIA rendition team in Hong Kong.”

My next question concerned a second period during which Snowden's whereabouts are unknown—the period between the time he left the Mira Hotel on June 10, 2013 and the day he left Hong Kong for Russia on June 23, 2013. When I asked my consulate source whether the US mission took any action to track Snowden during these 13 days, he explained that the FBI had a contingent of “legal attaches” based at the consulate to pursue, among other things, video pirates. In addition, the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency had a handful of “China-watchers” in

Hong Kong. This group constituted the intelligence "mission," as he referred to it. After Snowden outed himself on the Internet, the mission began tracking Snowden's movements. Since Snowden, his lawyers and the journalists in his entourage frequently used their cell phones to text one another, it was fairly easy for the mission to follow Snowden's trail after he left the Mira hotel. Presumably, the Hong Kong Police also knew where he was during this period. My source further suspected that the massive Chinese intelligence contingent in Hong Kong also knew, since it had close relations with the Hong Kong police. If so, Snowden's whereabouts as he moved every few days from apartment to apartment was no secret anyone but the public from June 10th to June 23rd. "Of course we knew," he said, adding that there were also photographs of Snowden entering the office building that housed the Russian consulate. I mentioned that there was a report in a Russian newspaper that Snowden had visited the Russian consulate in late June in connection with the flight he later took to Moscow. "All we know is he entered the building," he answered, with a shrug. That visit did not come as a complete surprise to US intelligence. After Snowden left the Mira, his interactions with the Russian and Chinese intelligence services in Hong Kong also had been closely monitored by the "secret means," as was subsequently confirmed to me a former top intelligence executive in Washington DC. All of Snowden's stealth in exiting from the Mira hotel, which included wearing a baseball cap and dark glasses, was ineffective in hiding him from US intelligence and presumably other intelligence services seeking the treasure trove of documents he had taken from the NSA. Among other things, the Hong Kong lawyers moving him to a safe house were carrying easily traceable cell phones.

The mystery that most concerned me was, however, not where Snowden was housed in the interim between when he went public and when he went to Moscow. It was where, and in whose care, Snowden had been *before*, he had checked into the Mira hotel on June 1st. When I asked him about this period, he said that as far as he knew neither the FBI nor the Hong Kong police could find a trace of him during the period between May 20th, when he passed through Hong Kong customs, and June 1st, when he used his credit card and passport to check into the Mira hotel. They could not find any credit card charges, ATM withdrawals, telephone calls, hotel registrations, subway pass purchases or other clues to Snowden's activities. As far as a paper trail was concerned, Snowden was a ghost during this period. Could an American just vanish in Hong Kong for eleven days, I asked"? "Apparently he did just that," my source replied.

Snowden's whereabouts during these 11 days was not a mystery I was going to solve on this first trip to Hong Kong. I needed to know more about Snowden's activities before he flew to Hong Kong. After all, Snowden was not, as he himself pointed out from Moscow, an "angel descending from the heavens." He had a past working for the US government that extended back seven years. During that period, he had been part of America's secret intelligence regime, and held a clearance for Sensitive Compartmented Information, or SCI. Such SCI material is considered so sensitive that it must be handled within formal access control systems established by the Director of National Intelligence.

Nor did Snowden's breach begin with him handing over classified documents to the *Guardian* reporters in Hong Kong in June 2013 or, for that matter, in the eleven days prior to his meeting with journalists in 2013. He had, as the NSA quickly determined begun illicitly copying documents in the late summer of 2012. Such an enterprise does not emerge from thin air. Even if he had managed to elude American intelligence from late May to early June 2013, he could not hide all the history that led to his decision to come to Hong Kong. There had to be an envelope of reality surrounding it, including Snowden's motivation, associates, movements, finances, and his activities prior to his fleeing to Hong Kong. What was missing was not just Snowden's first 11 days in Hong Kong but the entire context of the alleged crime. I now needed to fill in that envelope of reality in America. I left Hong Kong for New York on June 2, 2014 two days after my meeting with the former official of the consulate.

PART ONE

THE INTELLIGENCE CRISIS

CHAPTER ONE

The Great Divide

"What you've seen so far is just the tip of the iceberg."

-- retired Admiral Michael McConnell, vice chairman of Booz Allen Hamilton

On June 9, 2013, the *Guardian*, the British newspaper known for the quality and gravity of its reporting posted Snowden's 12-minute video on its website. In it, Snowden identified himself as an infrastructure analyst at a regional base of National Security Agency that was located in Oahu, Hawaii. He revealed in a calm, unemotional voice that he had been the source for the stories in both the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post.* He said that he had supplied the secret, classified documents that the two newspapers had used in their scoops about domestic surveillance being conducted by the NSA, America's enormous electronic surveillance agency. These sensational revelations had been, literally, the talk of the world, and now, in another major news event, the boyish-looking Snowden revealed his responsibility for what would turn out to be the largest theft of top-secret documents in the history of U.S. intelligence.

In the video, Snowden was questioned by Glenn Greenwald, an American journalist living in Brazil who had broken the NSA story in the *Guardian*. What was his motive? Greenwald asked. Why did he do it? Snowden replied that he had become horrified by the NSA's secret operations which, to him, represented a kind of distillation of the excesses of the American national security state, and he therefore made it his mission to blow the whistle. He believed that the public needed to be informed of the existence of a vast, secret surveillance operation directed against tens of millions of Americans that flagrantly violated US laws and was a grave threat to their privacy and their freedoms. Within hours of the release of that video on the *Guardian* website, Snowden was one of the most famous people in the world, celebrated by his supporters as a courageous whistle-blower.

The Snowden interview in the video subsequently was expanded by the documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras into the two-hour movie *CitizenFour*, which won the 2015 academy-award for the best documentary. Poitras said in accepting her Oscar in the Academy Awards Theater in Hollywood on February 22nd 2015, that Snowden acted as a whistle-blower not only to "expose a threat to our privacy but to our democracy itself." She received a standing ovation. The film convincingly depicts Snowden as an altruistic young man who is willing to risk his own personal freedom and face years of imprisonment for the sake of others. Adding to the drama, almost all the footage of Snowden in the film is from interviews with him in the confines of Snowden's small room at the Mira hotel from June 3 to June 9th, 2013, as the event was actually unfolding. Snowden, speaking for the camera, describes himself as a civilian contractor for the National Security Agency. He took full responsibility for the theft of classified documents, saying that he had acted alone. He said that he had been forced to take these documents to expose a crime that threatened the freedom of Americans: the US government's illegal surveillance of US citizens. He said that he had a duty to bring this secret activity to the attention of the American people. "Sitting on his unmade bed—white sheets and covers, white headboard, white bathrobe, white skin—Snowden seems like a figure in some obscure ritual, being readied for sacrifice," George Packer wrote about the film in a widely-read article in *The New Yorker*. He said repeatedly he was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, by allowing himself to go to prison, so that Americans could live in freedom. A large part of the public, who viewed this powerful film, including many of my colleagues in journalism whose writing I greatly respect, came to accept Snowden's whistle-blowing narrative.

This powerful narrative, as lucidly articulated by Poitras, Greenwald and other Snowden supporters, described the NSA activities exposed by Snowden as part of a vast criminal conspiracy involving, among others, President Obama, James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence and both Democrat and Republican members of the Congressional oversight committees. It further derided claims that there was evidence that Snowden's theft of NSA secrets went beyond exposing government misdeeds as part of an orchestrated effort to demonize Snowden. The purpose of this demonization was to divert away from the government's crimes. For example, this narrative asserted as if it was established fact, that US government officials had deliberately "trapped" Snowden in Russia. According to Snowden, the purpose of this government ploy was to "demonize" him.

To be sure, it is not unprecedented for the government to release defamatory information about individuals who have embarrassed US intelligence by defecting. When two NSA analysts, William Martin and Bernon Mitchell, defected to Russia in the 1960s and accused the NSA of violating international law after arriving in Moscow, U.S. government officials responded by putting out the story that they were homosexual lovers, which was both untrue and irrelevant to the intelligence secrets that they compromised. So it is certainly possible that the government put out information to intentionally defame Snowden. Secretary of State John Kerry, after all, characterized him as a coward who should "man up" by returning to the United States.

While one can discount such characterizations against him by government officials as demonization, as I do, one cannot as easily dismiss the independent evidence that undermines Snowden assertion that his sole motive was blowing the whistle on illicit surveillance in the United States. For example, by the Lawfare Institute in cooperation with The Brookings Institution in 2014 did an independent analysis of all the published documents that Snowden provided to the media. It concluded that, with some notable exceptions, such as the two documents initially published by the *Guardian* and *Washington Post,* the now famous FISA warrant and the PRISM slides, few of the other documents that Snowden had given Poitras and Greenwald for publication had little to do with either domestic surveillance or the infringements on the privacy of Americans. By the Lawfare Institute's count, 32 of Snowden's leaks to these journalists concerned the NSA's overseas sources and method, nine identified overseas locations of the NSA's intelligence bases, 25 of them revealed the identities of foreign officials of interest to US intelligence agencies, 14 of them disclosed information about Internet companies legally cooperating with the NSA, and 19 of them concerned technology products that the NSA had been using or researching. In addition, a considerable number of the published documents did not even belong to the NSA but were copies of reports sent to the NSA by its allies, including the British, Australian, Canadian, French, Norwegian and Israeli intelligence services. For example, he provided journalists with secret documents from the British cyber service GCHQ describing its own plans to obtain a legal warrant to penetrate the Russian computer security firm Kaspersky to expand its "computer network exploitation capability." All the GCHQ was revealing in this document was its own capabilities to monitor a Russian target of interest to it. While the release of these foreign documents may have embarrassed foreign allies of the United States, they exposed no violations of US law by the NSA. It was a legitimate part of the NSA's job to share information with its allies. This raises the question: what constitutes whistle-blowing?

To the general public no doubt, a whistle-blower is simply a person who exposes government misdeeds from inside that government. But in the eyes of the law someone who discloses classified information to an unauthorized person, even as an act of personal conscience, is not exempt from punitive consequences of his act. Indeed, if a person deliberately reveals secret US operations, especially ones that compromise the sources and methods of US intelligence services, he or she may run afoul of American espionage laws.

In the past when government employees have disclosed classified information to journalist to redress perceived government misconduct, they almost always received prison sentences, Just during Obama's presidency, there were six government employees who, as a matter of personal conscience, shared classified information they obtained from the FBI, CIA, State Department and US Army with journalists. They were Shamai Leibowitz in 2010, Chelsea Manning in 2013, John Kiriakou in 2013, Donald Sachtleben in 2013, Stephen Kim in 2014 and Jeffrey Sterling in 2014. Like Snowden, they claimed to be whistle-blowers informing the public of abuses of the government. But since they disclosed classified documents, they were dealt with as law-breakers. All six men were indicted, tried, convicted and received prison sentences. Sterling, a CIA officer who allegedly turned over a document to James Risen, a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter for the *New York Times*, was sentenced to 42 months, for example. The most severe sentence was meted out to Private Bradley/Chelsea Manning, who an Army court sentenced to 35 years in a military stockade.

The prison time that others received did not go unnoticed by Snowden. He had been following the Manning case since 2012. In fact, he posted about it shortly before he began stealing far more damaging documents than had Manning. He therefore would have been aware that by revealing state secrets that he had sworn to protect, he would be risking imprisonment unless, unlike Manning, he fled the country. His motives, no matter how noble they might be, would not spare him, anymore than it spared the other six, from determined federal prosecution.

To be sure, the view of those on the Snowden side of the divide is not grounded in legal definitions, but in a broader notion of morality. Snowden‘s supporters do not accept that the law should be applied in this fashion to Snowden. They argue that Snowden had a moral imperative to act, even if it meant breaking the law. They fully accepted his view that he had a higher duty to protect citizens of all countries in the world from, as he put it, “secret pervasive surveillance.” That higher duty transcended him any narrower legal definitions of law-breaking. For example, Ben Wizner, a lawyer from the American Civil Liberties Union who represented Snowden since November 2013, argues that Snowden’s taking of classified documents was as “act of conscience” that overrode any legal constraints because it “revitalized democratic oversight in the U.S.” And, without question, Snowden’s theft caused a much needed debate on govern surveillance.

In this ends- justify-the-means view, any person with access to government secrets can authorize himself or herself to reveal those secrets to the world if it serves the public good and because doing so would be an “act of conscience,” he or she should be immune from legal prosecution.

So for Snowden’s supporters, his “act of conscience” justifies his claim to being a whistle-blower even though the preponderance of the secrets disclosed by Snowden had to do with the NSA’s authorized activity of using its multi-billion dollar global arrays of sensors to intercept data in foreign countries and share it with some 30 allied intelligence services, as it did in 2013. Snowden, for example, took the NSA to task for its sharing information with Israel. In an interview in Moscow with James Bamford for *Wired* Magazine in August 2014, Snowden describes supplying intelligence to Israel as “One of the biggest abuses we’ve seen.” He was referring to the NSA providing the Israeli Cyber Service, known as Unit 8200, with data concerning Arab communications in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. But providing Israel with such data, as well as providing it with lethal weaponry, was not some rogue operation. It was part of a policy that had been approved by every American President—and every Congress—since 1948. Snowden had every right to disagree with this established US policy of aiding Israel with intelligence, but it is another matter to release secret documents to support his view. If the concept of whistle blowing is expanded to cover intelligence workers who steal secrets because they disagree with their government’s foreign policy of their government, it would also have to include many notorious spies, such as Kim Philby.

Snowden’s concept of whistle-blowing also applied to NSA’s spying on adversary nations. “We’ve crossed lines.” Snowden said in regard to China, “We’re hacking universities and hospitals and wholly civilian infrastructure.” The NSA’s operations against China were such “a real concern" for Snowden that he targeted lists of the NSA's penetrations in China. This expansion of the whistle-blowing concept to adversaries was echoed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. He complimented Snowden for having "uncovered illegal acts by the United States around the globe," Putin's view implies a convenient global concept of whistle-blowing that justified breaking US laws.

Even so, this whistle-blower interpretation of Snowden's act has had immense international resonance in the media. The *Washington Post* and Britain's *Guardian*, the newspapers that initially published the purloined documents, won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize. The journalists, who assisted Snowden in this enterprise, including Greenwald and Poitras, were awarded the 2014 Polk Award for national-security reporting. Former Congressman Ron Paul organized a clemency petition in February for Snowden, stating: "Thanks to one man's courageous actions, Americans know about the truly egregious ways their government is spying on them," and his son, Senator Rand Paul, who was a candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination in 2016, calling for a Presidential pardon for Snowden.

Senator Paul's concern fitted with the growing public apprehension over increasing intrusion on its privacy. Snowden was correct, in my opinion, in describing the threat of a surveillance state and the loss of privacy is certainly a legitimate public concern. "We actually buy cell phones that are the equivalent of a network microphone that we carry around in our pockets voluntarily," he pointed out from Moscow.

Snowden is correct that the technology involved in the electronic equipment we all use in the 21st century has made mass surveillance part of our daily life. There can be little doubt that our privacy has been largely eroded, if not entirely negated, by the widespread use of cell phones, credit cards, social media and the search engines of the Internet. When we use smart phones, as most Americans do today, our location is relayed to our telephone service provider every three seconds. The phone companies collect and archive our phone usage "metadata," which includes whom we called and how long we spoke. When we use Google to search for anyone or anything on the Internet, that activity is captured by Google, a company whose profits mainly come from making available to advertisers the results of its surveillance and collection of its users' searches. When we use Gmail, the Google's email service used by nearly one-billion senders and recipients, we agree to allow Google to read the actual contents of our correspondence to find keywords in them of interest to advertisers. When we use a credit card, the credit card company also retains data about what we buy and where we go. When we travel in automobiles equipped with GPS, every turn and stop is tracked and recorded. And when we are in public places with CCTV cameras, our image is recorded and archived. When we use Facebook, Twitter, and other so-called social media, as over two billion people do today, we allow these companies to collect, retain and exploit its surveillance of our movements, associations with other people, and stated preferences. When we use Amazon and other on-line stores, we allow them to track and archive a great deal of our commercial activity. For Internet companies, such as Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo and Google, collecting private data on hundreds of millions of their members provide them with vast searchable data bases that they can sell to advertisers and other search parties. The exploitation of these data bases is a fundamental aspect of their business plans. Without such surveillance of their users, social media companies would not be able to turn a profit. Indeed, they may be more aptly called surveillance media rather than social media. For those of us who use them to post pictures and communicate, any notion of personal privacy is largely illusionary.

To be sure, there is a distinction to made between the surveillance of our activities to which we voluntarily agree in exchange for the benefits and conveniences that we gain from social media, search engines, and other Internet companies, and the surveillance done by government to which we do not voluntarily invite-- or want. We willingly waive our privacy for corporations but not for governments. What the public might not fully realize, however, is that all the personal information in data bases of private companies can be accessed by the government if it obtains a court order or search warrant. As Snowden himself pointed out, “If Facebook is going to hand over all of your messages, all of your wall posts, all of your private photos, all of your private details from their server, the government has no need to intercept all of the communications that constitute those private records." These Internet companies, even if they are only interested in exploiting the data for its own profit, cannot refuse to share this information with the NSA, FBI and other agencies of the government if they have a court-ordered search warrant, Consequently, all the information these private corporations collect about us is legally available to any municipal, state and federal authority that obtains a warrant from a court. And such search warrants are routinely issued. That reality became evident to me in my investigation of the rape charges brought (and subsequently dropped) against Dominique Strauss- Kahn, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, in 2011. Immediately after his arrest, Cyrus Vance Jr, the district attorney of New York county, obtained a warrant for Strauss-Kahn’s cell phone records, credit card records, hotel room electronic key records, emails, room service bills, and the CCTV videos of his activities (some of which I published in my article about the case in the *New York Review of Books*). If anyone doubts the pervasiveness of government data collection, consider a little known government agency called the “Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.” Created in 2010 by Congress, it mines data on a monthly basis from some 600 million personal credit card accounts, targeting about 95 percent of the credit cards users in the United States. In additions, through 11 other data mining programs, it gathers data on everything from private home mortgages and student loans to credit scores and overdrafts in personal banks accounts. This ubiquitous surveillance of virtually every non-cash transaction came about because of advances in computer technology which made it economically feasible to mine data.

Nor is the concern raised by Snowden about NSA domestic surveillance misplaced. Ever since the 9-11 attack the NSA has increasingly played a role in this surveillance state not by own choice but because Congress mandated it. In 2001, it empowered the NSA to obtain and archive data on American citizens. Accordingly, the NSA obtained the billing records of customers from phone and Internet companies and archived these records. The operation was intended to build a searchable data base for the government that could be used to trace the history of the telephone and Internet activities in the United States of FBI-designated foreign terrorists and spies. The government also kept secret these anti-terrorist programs from the public because it did not want the foreign suspects to realize their communications in America were being monitored. The public only learned that the phone company was turning over its billing records on June 5, 2013, when Snowden disclosed it to the *Guardian and Washington Post.* The documents he provided the journalists showed that the NSA had been obtaining phone records every three months that had been collected by Verizon. While this revelation may have shocked the American public, the NSA had not acted on its own. It had obtained a warrant issued by a secret court established by Congress in 1978 as part of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) for each request for records. Congress empowered the FISA court to hear cases and authorize search warrants in secret in cases involving national security. As its name implies, the FISA court was meant to deal with matters bearing on foreign intelligence activities in the United States. That restriction changed after the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A month after the attack, Congress expanded the purview of the FISA court by passing the USA Patriot Act (an acronym which stands for "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism"). Part of the Act, Section 215, euphemistically referred to as the "library records" provision, permitted the FISA court to issue warrants authorizing searches of records by the NSA and other federal agencies to investigate international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities Through these FISA authorizations, the NSA could obtain "tangible things" such as "books, records, papers, documents, and other items." Under the interpretation of this section of the law by both the Bush and Obama administrations, the FISA court was enabled by Congress to issue warrants to telephone companies demanding that they turn over to the NSA the bulk billing records of all calls made in America.. The FISA court need only deem these records to be "relevant: to the FBI's investigations of terrorists and spies. Essentially, this controversial interpretation of the word "relevant" in Section 215 by the FISA court was used by the NSA to create a searchable database of telephone billing records. Such a "haystack," as the NSA called the national collection of billing records, could allow the FBI to instantly find missing "needles," even if the connections were made years earlier. For example, if the FBI had a lead on a foreign suspect, it could search the data base for any telephone calls made by the foreign suspect to telephone numbers in America, and then who those people called. The FBI always had this power, if it obtained a warrant, but it did not have the records previously in a single data base. General Alexander believed such a "Haystack" database made sense. His approach was, 'Let's collect the whole haystack,'" according to one former senior U.S. intelligence official quoted by the *Washington Post.* According to its critics, including the ACLU, the results provided by this vast database did not justify its immense potential for abuse. In early May 2015, just three weeks before this part of the Patriot Act was set to expire, a three-judge panel of the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, agreed with the ACLU position, overturning a lower court decision that it was legal. The panel found that the word "relevant" in the Act was not intended by Congress to justify the acquisition and storing of the bulk records of telephone companies. It declared that the government's interpretation of Section 215 of The Patriot Act was incorrect. Soon afterwards Congress replaced the Patriot Act with the USA Freedom Act, which effectively transferred bulk storage of billing records from the NSA to the phone companies themselves. Despite the change in venue, the records of individuals were still not completely private. The databases held by phone companies could still be searched under the new law via a FISA warrant by the FBI.

The core of Snowden's charge in the media was that the FISA court overreached its authority by issuing sweeping warrants that allowed the NSA to obtain data collected by private phone and Internet companies. It the initial story published in the *Guardian* on June 5, 2013, Snowden disclosed one such FISA warrant to support his charge. It was issued by Judge Roger Vinson of the FISA court on April 25, 2013 and ordered Verizon to turn over to the FBI all its billing records of landline customers for the next 90 days. The FBI presented this FISA authorization to the NSA, which acts as a service organization for the FBI and CIA in collecting communications data. The NSA, with the FISA warrant in hand, then obtained the Verizon billing records. Snowden also provided the *Washington Post* and *Guardian* with another secret document, which was actually a power point presentation on 20 slides by the NSA to other intelligence agencies. It described a program it was using for monitoring the Internet. Its code name was PRISM. It was authorized under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and was designed to collect messages sent over the Internet from foreigners. Since most of the Internet pipes that carried these messages ran through the United States, the NSA intercepted a large part of the data from Internet companies based in America. This program was not entirely secret from the Internet companies. Such information was in fact obtained with FISA court approval and with the knowledge of the service providers. It also requires a written directive from both the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence, and a review by the Department of Justice every three months of each case. After obtaining this data, the NSA ran programs to filter out all domestic Internet communications. In theory at least, PRISM targeted foreign communications, but, as Snowden pointed out, domestic information was also accidently picked up. Whenever the Justice Department actually opened an investigation against Americans in contact with foreign suspects, as it did in 170 cases in 2013, it could obtain warrants from the FISA court to search these Americans' Internet activities. So though PRISM supposedly was a tool for foreign surveillance, it could be extended to Americans in contact with foreign suspects.

These two documents raised legitimate questions for many Americans, including members of Congress, about the proper role of the FISA court, including should it conduct its business in secret? If Snowden had released only these two documents that related to unwarranted domestic surveillance, and other possible violations of the law by the NSA, it would be difficult for any reasonable person not to see his actions as a valuable and even necessary public service. After all, as the three-judge panel of the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals would later find, Congress had not intended Section 215 of the Patriot Act to be used to justify the bulk collection of American records. So if he had limited his illegal downloading to the few documents about bulk collection, it would be more difficult to argue that he was not a whistle-blower in spirit if not in the letter of the law and even a hero of the struggle to preserve our civil liberties. But, in fact, he took a great many other secret documents that did not bear on civil liberties issues.

As a result, the Snowden case produced a great divide in the American appreciation of him. On one hand, he has been almost universally lauded and lionized by what might be seen as the mainstream media, by numerous academics, and even, as we have seen, by members of Congress. The journalists who assisted him, such as like Greenwald, Poitras and/ Gellman also have been celebrated for the roles they played in bringing Snowden's revelations to the public. In other circles, the appreciation had been of him has been very different. American and British intelligence officials, senior members of the Obama Administration, and members of the oversight committees of Congress do not view Snowden as a hero or even an authentic whistle-blower. Instead they see him as a betrayer of secrets who, acting willfully brought damage to the United States and benefits to its adversaries. The holders of this darker view of Snowden base it on classified reports of the full extent of the theft of classified data. Those officials reckon that only handful of the tens of thousands of documents he stole involved domestic surveillance, and these few documents served as a cover for a much larger theft. Admiral Michael Rogers, who replaced General Alexander as head of the NSA in January 2014, said that March at a public forum at Princeton University. "Edward Snowden is not the "whistleblower" some have labeled him to be." He further explained to Congress: "Snowden stole from the United States government a large amount of classified information, a small portion of which is germane to his apparent central argument regarding NSA and privacy issues." Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, went even further. He testified to the House Armed Services Committee on March 6, 2014, after estimating that the Snowden breach could cost the military "billions" to repair, added that "The vast majority of the electronic documents that Snowden exfiltrated from our highest levels of security had nothing to do with exposing government oversight of domestic activities." He based this assessment on then still-secret Defense Intelligence Agency's report on the breach. Although he did not reveal the full extent of the damage even in his classified testimony to Congress in 2013, the classified DIA report showed that Snowden took "over 900,000" military files from the Department of Defense (DoD) in addition to the NSA files he had taken.. The Defense Department loss in terms of the number of files stolen actually exceeded the loss, in sheer numbers, of NSA documents. Lieutenant General Mike Flynn, the DIA director, who directed the DIA secret study, testified to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that the breach "has caused grave damage to our national security."

To be sure, this was not the first time that the cryptological branches of the military had been compromised. The spy ring of John Walker had provided thousands of the Navy's reports on breaking Russian ciphers to the KGB during the Cold War era, for example. But the Snowden breach exposing military sources was an order of magnitude greater than any past breach.

The CIA's assessment was no less grim. Michael J. Morell, the deputy director of the CIA in 2013, who, after Snowden's breach, was appointed by President Obama to the task force to review the NSA's intelligence breach and its consequences for national security, wrote that Snowden's action went beyond taking the handful of documents, such as the FISA order, "that addressed the privacy issue." Instead, as Morell put it, "he backed up a virtual tractor trailer and emptied a warehouse full of documents—the vast majority of which he could not possibly have read and few of which he would likely understand—[and] and he delivered the documents to a variety of news organizations and God knows who else." As a result, Morell concluded "Snowden's disclosures will go down in history as the greatest compromise of classified information ever."

General Keith Alexander, the head of the NSA at the time, came to a very similar assessment, asserting that Snowden did "the greatest damage to our combined nations' intelligence systems that we have ever suffered." To be sure, it is to be expected that military intelligence officers would not be on Snowden's side of the divide (and the Snowden breach ended the career of many of them, including General Alexander.)

But political leaders in both parties could also be found on the anti-Snowden side of the divide. "I don't look at this as being a whistle-blower." Senator Dianne Feinstein (D. - Calif.), the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said after she was briefed on Snowden's theft of documents. "I think it's an act of treason." Rep. Mike Rogers, (R.-Mich.), her counterpart on the House Intelligence Committee, said on the NBC program, "Meet the Press," that Snowden might be working for a foreign intelligence service. And a former prominent member of President Obama's cabinet went even further, suggesting to me off the record in March this year that there are only three possible explanations for the Snowden heist: 1) It was a Russian espionage operation; 2) It was a Chinese espionage operation, or 3) It was a joint Sino-Russian operation. These severe accusations generated much heat but little light. They were not accompanied by any evidence from these Congressional leaders showing that Snowden had acted in concert with any foreign power in stealing the files or, for that matter, that he was not acting out of his own personal convictions, not matter how misguided they may have been.

On this side of the divide, Snowden's critics regard the whistle blowing narrative as at best incomplete, and at worst fodder for the naive. They point out that the FISA document that gave him credentials as a whistle-blower was only issued in the last week of April 2013, which was three months *after* he first contacted Greenwald and almost 9 months after he began illegally copying secret documents. They further believe that the evidence contradicts Snowden's claims that he stole only documents that exposed NSA transgression into domestic surveillance, that he turned over all the stolen documents to journalists, and that he was forced to remain in Moscow by the actions of the US government. They believe that all three of these claims, which are at the conceptual basis of the whistle blowing story, are false. They also find that the unprecedented size and complexity of the penetration of NSA files, compromising hundreds of thousands of secret documents pertaining to US operations against adversary nations, according to the NSA's and Pentagon estimates, does not afford an innocent explanation for the volume of files he took.

The deep split in how Snowden is perceived brings to mind the famous drawing of a duck -rabbit cartoon first published in 1900 in the book *Fact and Fable in Psychology*. The figure is perceived either as a duck or as a rabbit but it cannot be seen as both simultaneously. Whether a person sees a rabbit or duck in this test may depend on the information available to that person. For example, if the person has never seen an image of a rabbit before, he will see almost certainly see a duck; and vice versa.

Similarly, what may account for the sharp divide between the Snowden and anti-Snowden camps is a disparity in the available information. The pro-Snowden camp's view is largely informed by Snowden himself. It prefers to believe his words over his actions.

In the anti-Snowden camp are administration officials and the members of the House and Senate intelligence oversight committees who have been at least partially briefed on the continuing investigations of the Snowden affair. The members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, for example, were briefed by David Leatherwood, the director of operations of the Defense

Intelligence Agency that the military files compromised by Snowden included documents bearing on military plans and weapons systems; foreign government's intelligence activities (including special activities), intelligence sources, or methods or cryptology;
Scientific and technological matters relating to national security;; vulnerabilities systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relations to national security and the development, production, or use of weapons of mass destruction. The members of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, but not the public, also have been privy to an NSA investigation that established the chronology of his actions, including changing jobs, copying more than one million classified documents at the Signals Intelligence Center in Hawaii and flying to Russia.

Nor does additional information necessarily change the minds of people who already have a firm view. In the field of social psychology, the testing of "confirmation theory" consistently shows that people tend to more readily reject new information that contradicts their pre-existing beliefs. For example, when Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested in the Texas Theater on November 22, 1963, he said famously, "I haven't shot anybody." Ten months later, the Warren Commission presented evidence, including ballistic tests that it claimed showed that Oswald had shot three people, including President John F. Kennedy, less than an hour before making his statement. Yet, many of those who believed Oswald's public proclamation his innocence chose to believe that the government had falsified all the incriminating evidence to tarnish Oswald (who had been killed on November 24, 1963) rather than accept that they had been wrong in believing Oswald.

The charges, countercharges and defamatory name-calling in the Snowden case therefore only deepened the great divide. Those who saw Snowden as a democratic hero exposing the abuses of power of an out-of-control national security state tended to dismiss anything that depicts Snowden in a negative light as a fabrication while those who saw Snowden as a "traitor" tended to dismiss anything that depicted him in a more positive light.

When it comes to the murky universe of spy agencies, the problem in deciding where the truth lies is further heightened by the possibility of deliberate deception. Spy masters are, after all, in the business of concealing their most sensitive operations. It is often considered essential that important secrets be protected by what Winston Churchill famously termed "a bodyguard of lies." Top intelligence officials are not exempt from this practice. Consider, for example, the response to a question concerning the NSA's operations made by James D. Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence to the Senate Intelligence Committee on March 12, 2013. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) of the Committee asked the spy master if the NSA collected data on Americans. Clapper answered that the NSA did not knowingly "collect any type of data" on millions of Americans. Clapper's answer was clearly untrue. However, it did not mislead Senator Wyden or any other members of the Senate Intelligence Committee because Clapper had truthfully testified that the NSA did collect American's telephone records in a classified session of the Committee earlier that week. Who was being misled was the American public. Yet, none of the Senators on the Committee, including Senator Wyden, corrected this obviously false answer. When Clapper realized he had misspoken, he could not publically correct the record of the public session because, to do so, would be revealing classified information he had swore to protect. No doubt other intelligence officers find themselves in a similar bind in discussing secret matters. This suggests that there is a risk in accepting statements made by the intelligence chiefs at face value.

But Snowden also has a credibility problem. He has told numerous untruths including ones calculated to help him insinuate himself into the key position from which he stole secrets and to cover up the nature of his theft. For example, Snowden got access in the spring of 2013 to the super-secret NSA's computers storing these electronic files by working at Booz Allen Hamilton, a hedge-fund owned consulting firm, that helped manage computer systems at its Kunia base in Hawaii. On his application to Booz Allen in March 2013, Snowden claimed to be in the process of completing a master's degree at the University of Liverpool in computer security sciences, which he expected to get that year. Although he had registered two years earlier at the online division of University of Liverpool, he had not completed a single course there and, according to the registrar, he was not in line to receive a master's (or any) degree. To be sure, Snowden did not lie gratuitously. He told untruths to get access to classified documents and to get safely away with them.

He also was not entirely truthful with journalists whose trust he sought when it suited his purpose in protecting himself. For example, in contacting Laura Poitras under the alias Citizen Four in January 2013, he gave her his word that he was currently a "government employee," although in fact he was working for a private contractor at the time.

Snowden had little concern about misleading journalists when it suited his purpose. For example, he told Alan Rusbridger of the *Guardian, Brian Williams of NBC News,* James Bamford of *Wired Magazine,* Katrina vanden Heuvel of *the Nation,* Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post* and Jane Mayer of *The New Yorker* that the U.S, government intentionally acted to "trap" him in Moscow by revoking his passport while he was already on a plane to Moscow on the afternoon of June 23, 2013. Although he had first made this charge on July 1, 2013, none of these journalists asked Snowden what was the basis for his oft-repeated allegation. He did admit, however, during the Q&A following his July 12, 2013 press conference in Moscow that he had no independent source, sating t he had "read it" in the news reports. In fact, news stories prior to his statement reported that his passport had been revoked before he had left Hong Kong on June 22nd, 2013. ABC News, for example reported that the U.S. "Consul General-Hong Kong confirmed Hong Kong authorities were notified that Mr. Snowden's passport was revoked June 22." By the date to June 23rd, Snowden effectively provided to unsuspecting journalists an alibi for his presence in Russia.

The credibility problem with Snowden assumed a more sinister dimension once Snowden put himself and his fate in the hands of the Russian authorities in Moscow. Even though the Obama Administration decided against revealing the extent of Russian intelligence service's participation in Snowden's move from Hong Kong to Moscow, or what intelligence services call an "exfiltration," I was told by a Presidential National Security staff adviser that the government acted to protect the intelligence sources used by the CIA, NSA and FBI to track Snowden's movements in the latter part of June in Hong Kong. CIA Deputy Director Morell would go no further than to state that during that period he had no doubt the intelligence services of Russia and China "had an enormous interest in him and the information he [Snowden] had stolen." Presumably, the last thing these adversary services would want would be to make this "interest" transparent to the United States.

The role of concealment must be taken into account when assessing information bearing on the work of espionage services. I learned when I was interviewing James Jesus Angleton, the CIA's legendary ex-counterintelligence chief of the CIA in the 1970s for my book on deception that intelligence services play by a different set of rules than historians when it comes to their espionage successes. Angleton, a famously baroque thinker himself, impressed on me the complexity of espionage. He said "It's not enough just to steal a secret. It must be done in a way that the theft remains undetected." From his perspective, there were two requisites that had to be fulfilled to assure the success of any intelligence theft. The first task is the obvious one: acquiring by espionage an adversary's state secrets. The second task is concealment of that success. Deception is employed to obscure the nature and the extent of the espionage theft. This deception is necessary to extend the usefulness of theft. One of the most famous examples of this principle was the deceptions used by British intelligence in the Second World War to conceal its success in breaking the German ciphers generated by the Enigma machines. If German naval intelligence discovered Britain was able to read the ciphers it used to communicate with its U-boats, it would have stopped using them. So British intelligence hid its coup by supplying false information to known German spies to account for the sinking of U-boats, including the canard that British aerial cameras could detect one ingredient in the paint used to camouflage the U-boats. That same hoary principle of deception applies to modern-day communications intelligence. If the Russian, Chinese or any other adversary intelligence service got its hands on the documents stolen by Snowden from the NSA's repositories in Hawaii in 2013, it would likely employ deception, including well-crafted lies, to create as much ambiguity as possible as to the ultimate disposition of the missing documents. From this counterintelligence perspective, the intelligence issue that spawned the great divide cannot be resolved by accepting the uncorroborated statements made by a source, such as Snowden, who may be in the hands of the Russian security services in Moscow.

By the same token, the calculations made by NSA officials about the extent of the theft are also suspect. After all, the NSA is an intelligence service that often engages in secret machinations. We know that its top officials reported to the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, as well as the President's National Security Adviser, that over one million documents were compromised by Snowden. But if this was disinformation, it is difficult to see its purpose. Inflating the extent of the damage of the Snowden breach to the President, Congress and the Secretary of Defense obviously reflected poorly on their own management of the NSA, and their own careers. Yet such a possibility cannot be precluded in the arcane world of intelligence.

As in any case involving the loss of state secrets, uncontested facts remain in extremely short-supply. The opinion-laden appellatives such as “patriot” and “traitor” that have tended to fill the gap in the great divide do little to address the important mystery of how many thousands of state secrets were taken from the United States. How did Snowden breach the supposedly formidable defenses of the NSA? Did he have any assistance? How did he escape to Moscow? And what was the final destination of the stolen documents? The purpose is to find answers to these questions. For this endeavor, it is necessary to return to the crime scene: the NSA’s base in Hawaii.

CHAPTER TWO

The Crime Scene Investigation

"Any private contractor, not even an employee of the government, could walk into the NSA building, take whatever they wanted, and walk out with it and they would never know."

Edward Snowden, Moscow 2014

About 15 miles northwest of Honolulu on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, adjacent to the sprawling Wheeler Air Force Base, is a 250,000 square foot man-made mound of earth and reinforced concrete surrounded by an electrified fence. Inside the mound is a three story structure originally built by the Air Force in the Second World War as a bomb-proof aircraft repair facility. In the Cold War, it was modernized to withstand an enemy chemical, biological, radiological or Electrical Magnetic Pulse attacks, and used by the Navy's operation center for its Pacific fleet. After the Cold War ended, the huge edifice was turned over to the NSA, which had been created as an intelligence service to intercept the communications and signals of foreign countries after World War II, a mission which included vacuuming into its giant computer arrays telephone messages, missile telemetry, submarine signals and virtually everything on the electro-magnetic spectrum of interest to the US defense department and US intelligence agencies. Because it provided a valuable window on the activities of adversary nations in the Pacific region, it was able to monitor the ballistic missile tests and submarine activities of China, North Korea and Russia. As the NSA developed it, this Hawaiian base became one of its primary regional bases for gathering Asian communications intelligence. By 2013, the Kunia base, also called "the tunnel" by its NSA workers, had a vast array of state-of-the-art technology, including 90 Cray supercomputers arranged in a horseshoe configuration, used to decipher and make sense of the intercepted signals from China, Russia and North Korea. At the heart of the Hawaiian complex was a unit with both military and civilian employees. A large share of the civilians who ran the computers worked under two-year contract to the NSA's leading civilian contractor, Booz Allen Hamilton.

Keith Alexander, the four-star general who headed the NSA from 2005 to 2014, first learned about the impending story in the *Guardian* on June 4, 2013 while he was in Germany meeting with its top intelligence officials. Janine Gibson, the *Guardian's* American website editor had notified the NSA it intended to break a story based on NSA the next day. It took NSA counterintelligence less than 48 hours to determine that a civilian employee at the base from which documents were stolen had not reported back to work on June 3rd, 2013. It also determined he had lied on his application of a two-week medical leave and had flown to Hong Kong. The missing man was Edward Joseph Snowden, a 29-year civilian employee of Booz Allen Hamilton. At the time of the theft in May 2013, he was still being trained as an analyst at the Threat Operations Center. Personnel records further showed that he had worked there for less than six weeks. He had taken the medical leave on May 18, 2013 left the country by plane. By June 7th, he had become the NSA's main suspect. Snowden had been hired to work there as an outside contractor by Booz Allen Hamilton, a private company owned by a hedge fund, which managed much of the information technology at the Center.

General Alexander, returning to Washington DC after assigning the sensitive job of investigating the breach to Richard "Rick" Ledgett, the Director of the NSA's Threat Operations Center at NSA's headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland. It was a key position since the top-secret unit was responsible for discovering and countering the threats posed by Chinese, Russian and other adversary nations. Ledgett was also the logical choice to head the damage assessment investigation since the Center's regional branch in Hawaii was from where highly-sensitive documents were stolen and where the main suspect, Snowden, last worked. Ledgett immediately boarded a military jet bound for Hawaii. His first task was to reconstruct the chronology all of Snowden's moves at the Center, or, as the tactic is called in counterintelligence parlance, "walking the cat back."

The NSA meanwhile notified the FBI of Snowden's possible involvement in the theft of state secrets. It is in charge of criminal investigations of civilian US intelligence workers, even if they occur on a NSA base, The FBI immediately dispatched a top task force of agents to investigate a potential espionage case in Hawaii. When questioned, Lindsay Mills, who shared Snowden's rental home with him and had been his girl friend for 8 years, said Snowden was away on a business trip. After determining from airline and hotel data that he was in Hong Kong, the FBI realized Snowden was a possible intelligence defector. It froze his credit and bank cards. It also notified the passport office in the State Department the legal attaches at the Hong Kong consulate. The legal attaches, who were actually FBI field agents posted in Hong Kong, located Snowden at the Mira Hotel on June 8th. Such international detective work proved unnecessary since on the evening of June 10th, Snowden ended all doubts about the identity of the perpetrator by revealing in a 12-minute video posted on the *Guardian* website that he was the source of the stolen NSA documents for which the FBI was searching. The problem was that since Hong Kong was in China, US law enforcement did not have the means to recover them.

At that point, determining the magnitude of the theft of documents became a critical concern of the investigation. Aside from the few dozen documents published by the *Guardian* and *Washington Post*, what else had Snowden stolen?

Within the next few days, a small army of forensic investigators from the FBI, the Defense Department and the "Q" counterintelligence division of the NSA swarmed onto the NSA base in Hawaii. The proximate crime scene for their investigation was the National Threat Operations Center. They examined the cubicle where Snowden had last worked at NSA, and then began retracing all his activities at the NSA over the past four years. To begin with, they needed to find out how many documents from the Center had been copied and taken by Snowden.

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Pentagon's own intelligence service, meanwhile was kept partially in the dark. It did not learn from the NSA that Snowden had stolen military documents, concerning the joint Cyber Command until July 10, 2013. In terms of sheer quantity, the number of stolen military documents was staggering. The DIA found that Snowden had copied "over 900,000" military files. Many of these files came from this joint command, which had been set up in 2011 by the NSA and Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force cryptological services to combat the threat of warfare in cyberspace. The loss was considered of such importance that between 200 and 2500 military intelligence officers worked day and night for the next four months, according to the DIA's classified report, to "triage, analyze, and assess Department of Defense impacts related to the Snowden compromise." The job of this unit, called the Joint Staff Mitigation Oversight Task Force, was to attempt to contain the damage caused by the Snowden breach. In many cases, containment meant shutting down NSA operations in China, Russia, North Korea and Iran so they could not be used to confuse and distract the U.S. military.

The NSA and Defense Department were not the only government agencies concerned with determining the extent of the breach. There was also the CIA. The NSA acted as a service organization for it, handling most, if not all, of its requests for communication intelligence to support its international espionage operations. Although the CIA and NSA were both part of the so-called "Intelligence Community," the NSA did not immediately share with the CIA details of the Snowden breach. Despite the immense potential damage of the theft, it was not until a week later that CIA Director John Owen Brennan and Deputy Director Michael Morell were briefed by the NSA. When Morell realize how much data had been taken by Snowden, he was astounded "You might have thought of all the government entities on the planet, the one least vulnerable to such grand theft would have been the NSA," he wrote "but it turned out that the NSA had left itself vulnerable." According to Morell, he bluntly told the NSA briefer that it was urgent for the CIA to be brought in on the case. After all, only four years earlier Snowden had been employed by the CIA. Specifically, Morell said the CIA needed to find out three things. Has CIA documents had been part of Snowden's haul? How long had Snowden been stealing documents? Had Snowden been working "with any foreign intelligence service, either wittingly or not?" According to Morell, the effort to get a direct answer from NSA officials to these three key questions "proved maddeningly difficult." He found that in mid June NSA officials with whom he dealt were so "distraught at the massive security breach" that initially they even refused to allow CIA officers to participate in the on-going security review. A former NSA executive told me there was "near panic" at the NSA. Finally, Morell called Chris Inglis, a former professor of computer science who had risen to be the NSA's Deputy Director at the time of the breach. Inglis, who headed operations for the NSA, told him "the news was not good." Among the data copied by Snowden were a large number of CIA secrets. By the time, the CIA learned that its secrets had been compromised, Snowden was headed to Russia.

The investigation of a crime involving potential espionage is no easy task. In this case, it required attempting to solve a jigsaw puzzle in which not only were key pieces missing but, since it involved adversary intelligence services, some of the found pieces might have been twisted to deliberately to mislead the US investigators.

By late July, NSA investigators made their initial assessment. They determined that most of the material had been taken from sealed-off areas, known in intelligence-speak as "compartments," which in this case were files stored on computers that were isolated from any network. Each compartment electronically tracked all the activities that occur in them on their logs, including the password identity of any person who has gained entry to any compartment. From a forensic examination of these logs, NSA investigators were quickly able to reconstruct the timeline of the theft. The logs showed that an unauthorized party had begun copying files in mid-April, which was just days after Snowden began his job at the Center. The breach illicit activity ended just before Snowden's last day of work there. So this piece fit in with Snowden's guilt.

The size of the theft was another matter. Ledgett was certainly in a position to know. Not only had he been in charge of the National Threat Center at the time of the Snowden breach, but he personally supervised the NSA's damage assessment team. And, in the shake-up that followed that followed, he would replace Inglis as Deputy Director of the NSA. According to Ledgett, the perpetrator, moving from compartment to compartment, had "touched" 1.7 million documents. Of these "touched" documents, according to the analysis of the logs, more than one million of them were moved in mid-May by the unauthorized party to an auxiliary computer intended to be used for temporary storage by authorized service personnel. Finally, the data was transferred from this auxiliary computer to thumb drives. This download occurred just days before Snowden' left the NSA on May 17, 2013, having told the agency that he needed a leave of absence to undergo medical treatment in Japan. The FBI further established from airport records that Snowden flew to Hong Kong the next day presumably with thumb drives containing, by the government's calculation, over one million documents.

To be sure, the quantity of stolen documents does not necessarily reveal the damage, and can itself be misleading. Many documents that do not reveal current or known sources or methods and others may have little value to an enemy. And a large portion of the 1.7 million documents may have been duplications. But the quality of some of these documents is another matter. Just one document that exposed a source or method of which enemies are unaware can be of immense value. For example, one of the missing documents taken by Snowden provided what Ledgett called "a roadmap" to the NSA's current secret operations. That single document would reveal to an adversary such as Russia, China or Iran, according to Ledgett, "what we know, what we don't know, and, implicitly, a way to protect themselves." And there were many documents in the Snowden breach that met these criteria, according to a National Security official at the Obama White House.

The breach had happened on the watch of General Alexander, who headed both the NSA and the US Cyber Command, in 2013. A short, compact man with military bearing, Alexander closely followed the investigation as it developed over the summer of 2013. By then, of course, the whole world knew that Snowden had stolen a vast trove of NSA documents. But General Alexander saw major inconsistencies developing between Snowden own account of the theft and what had actually happened. To him, Snowden's timeline, as established by the government's investigators, did not match up to Snowden's story line. "Something is not right," Alexander said in an interview.

What was wrong with Snowden's account proceeded from unresolved inconsistencies in both the timing and nature of the theft. For one thing, Snowden had made the claim to journalists, four months after he was in Russia, that he had turned over all the documents he took from the NSA's compartments to journalists Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald in Hong Kong. However, on August 18, 2013, the investigators had the opportunity to examine the files that Snowden had actually given Poitras and Greenwald in Hong Kong. This discovery came when David Miranda, Greenwald's romantic partner, was detained at Heathrow Airport by British Authorities under Schedule Seven of Britain's Terrorism Act. At the time, as British intelligence presumably knew, Miranda was acting as a courier for Greenwald and Poitras. According to Greenwald's account, Snowden had given both him and Poitras identical copies of the NSA documents in Hong Kong. When Greenwald returned home to Rio de Janeiro, he found his copy was corrupted. But Poitras still had her digital copy of whatever stolen documents that Snowden had distributed to them. So Greenwald dispatched Miranda from Rio to Berlin to get a copy of Poitras' thumb dive. On the return trip, Miranda's plane stopped at Heathrow and British authorities temporarily detained him and temporarily took the thumb drive from him. Poitras had written out the password for Greenwald, and Miranda kept it with the thumb drive. The British quietly copied the contents and shared them with the NSA. As a result, the NSA discovered that Snowden had only given Poitras and Snowden some 58,000 documents. By any measure, it was only a tiny fraction of Snowden's total haul. The damage assessment team under Ledgett determined that some of these documents had been edited out of much larger documents that the NSA logs showed that he had copied. Snowden had evidently selected for the journalist's only parts of the lengthy documents. For example, only scattered fragments of the 36,000 page "road map" file were among the material on the thumb drive. By the count of both the NSA team and the Defense Department team almost one million documents were unaccounted for. If Snowden had not given these missing files to Poitras and Greenwald, the issue of what had happened to them became a critical missing piece in the puzzle.

Adding another layer to the mystery of the missing documents, the NSA investigation found that the chronology of the theft of documents did not support Snowden's claim to journalists that he had only been seeking whistle-blowing documents. Most of the documents he first took did not concern the domestic activities of the NSA. It was only towards the end of the theft that he copied documents that would qualify as whistle-blowing. In fact, the now-famous FISA court order to Verizon that was the basis of the initial *Guardian* expose was only issued by the FISA court on April 27, 2013. The other main whistle-blowing document he revealed, the PowerPoint presentation about PRISM, a joint NSA-FBI-CIA Internet surveillance program, that was the basis of the *Washington Post* expose, was also only issued in April 2013. Yet Snowden had been down-loading documents for some 10 months before he copied these documents. When I discussed the chronology of the copied documents with a former government official briefed on the investigation, he suggested that Snowden's purpose may have changed between 2012 and 2013. When I asked him what might have induced the change, he replied "That is one of the unanswered questions." That Snowden only took these two whistle-blowing documents at the tail-end of his 9-month operation, and after he had contacted Poitras and Greenwald, suggests he may have had another motive prior to contacting journalists. In light of this chronology, the investigation had to consider the possibility that his whistle-blowing was, partly if not wholly, a cover for another enterprise.

The investigation soon ran into another serious issue: his access. Snowden had described to journalists a situation in which he had access to" millions of records that [he] could walk out the door with at any time with no accountability, no oversight, no auditing, the government didn't even know they were gone," but, as it turned out, he was not among the limited number of individuals at the Center who had access to these documents, The NSA's and Booz Allen's employment records showed that Snowden had not yet completed his requisite on-the- job training at the National Threat Operations Center in Hawaii when he carried out the theft. Consequently, he had not yet been provided with the passwords he needed to get the documents. A former NSA official bluntly told me that Snowden, at least during the period of the thefts in April and May 2013, had no more legitimate access to the compartments than the cleaning personnel at the Center. Somehow he converted his proximity to access.

This lack of access could not be ignored in any law-enforcement investigation. Consider if a hundred top-quality D-flawless diamonds were stolen from locked vaults at Tiffany's by a recently-hired trainee who, it turned out, did not have either the combination to open these vaults. One possibility that the police would be expected to consider was that the trainee might have had help from a current or former insider at the company who knew the combinations. Snowden had accomplished a similar inexplicable feat as the hypothetical jewel thief.

In Snowden's case, the FBI had to consider two very different possibilities that could explain how he could have acquired the password. He said in his video confession that he was solely responsible but there was another possibility. He had help, unwitting or witting, from others and he was trying to protect away from them.

The FBI faced a dilemma. It could either assume that the NSA's security regime was so badly flawed that Snowden could trick his fellow workers into providing him with access or that there was another individual at the Center who might have assisted or directed Snowden. If it pursued the former hypothesis, it could close the case as far as the sitting Grand Jury was concerned. After all, Snowden had admitted he was the perpetrator and, if further evidence was needed, he could be seen showing stolen documents to Greenwald on the video. And Greenwald later used these documents. For the Grand Jury, it was, as one former federal prosecutor put it, "a slam dunk." Not even Snowden denied the charge that he gave secret documents to individuals that were not authorized to receive them, the same charge for which Manning was convicted. Even if it went no further, the FBI would satisfy its superiors in the Department of Justice that it had done its law-enforcement job. But if it pursued the latter hypothesis, it would need to engage in a mole hunt for a quarry that might not exist. By doing so, it could open a Pandora's Box of suspicions that it, or the NSA, might not ever be able to close. When the investigation came to this fork in the road in the summer of 2013, according to a source on the House Intelligence Committee, it chose the former route.

Finally, there was the question of whether Snowden had gone to Russia by design or accident. Whenever an intelligence worker steals sensitive compartmentalized information of interest to a foreign adversary and then defect to it, it raises at least the specter of state-sponsored espionage. It is a commonly accepted presumption in counterintelligence that a spy, fearing arrest, flees to a country that has some reason to offer him protection. When the British spies Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby, for example, fled to Moscow in the Cold War the presumption was that they had a prior intelligence connection with Russia. And Philby confirmed it in his 1968 memoir *"My Silent War*." So in the case of Snowden, counterintelligence had to consider the possibility that his theft of state secrets and his arrival in Moscow might not be totally coincidental.

For his part, Snowden said that he did not leave Hong Kong with the intention of staying in Russia, but that the U.S. government "trapped him" at Moscow's Airport by revoking his passport. He told editor of The *Nation* magazine: "I'm in exile. My government revoked my passport intentionally to leave me exiled." He added that the U.S. government "chose to keep me in Russia." Although he repeated that assertion over a dozen times, it was untrue. The US government had not invalidated his passport for travel back to the United States. When criminal charges are lodged against a U.S, citizen by the Department of Justice, the State Department, in accordance with the U.S. code of justice, marks in the electronic passport validation advisory system that that person's passport is electronically marked valid only for return to the U.S. After criminal charges were filed against Snowden, including the theft of classified government documents, it advised foreign governments that Snowden was wanted on felony charges, and "should not be allowed to proceed in any further international travel, other than is necessary to return him to the United States." It was simply requiring that his passport, which is a State Department document, be used for him to return to the United States. Rather than preventing Snowden from returning to the United States, or "exiling" him, the government facilitated his return home. With his passport, he could have flown home from either Hong Kong or Moscow, where he, like any other person accused of a felony, would face the charges against him. Nor was it plausible that President Obama and Secretary Of State Clinton would conspire to trap a perpetrator carrying incredibly valuable national security secrets in Russia.

The counterintelligence investigation had little difficulty establishing that Snowden's trapped" version in the media was not consistent with the actual chronology of the events. Snowden claimed that the U.S. State Department had acted while the plane was flying to Moscow on June

23rd but in actuality it had acted on June 22, 2013, which was the day *before* the plane (or Snowden) departed from Hong Kong. The Hong Kong authorities had been advised as early as June 19, 2013 that there were criminal charges against Snowden and only a typographical error in spelling out Snowden's middle name—James instead of John-- in the criminal charges prevented the Hong Kong police from immediately ordering his detention. His Hong Kong lawyers were advised of the pending charges, which were unsealed on June 21, 2013 and published on front page of the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong. So presumably Snowden knew that action by the U.S. government was imminent. One of his lawyers, Jonathan Mann, even accompanied Snowden to the airport out of his concern that he would not even be allowed by Hong Kong authorities to go through passport control. Although Snowden still had a US passport in his possession, the computerized database would show on June 23rd, it was no longer valid for travel to anywhere but the U.S.

This electronic notification advised foreign government that his passport was only approved for his return to the U.S. Even so, when he arrived in Russia any future international travel decisions for him would be up to Russia, not the U.S. So the only government with the means to "trap" him in Russia was the Russian government.

The U.S. government also knew that his it was no accident that Snowden wound up in the hands of Russia. He had been in contact with Russian officials in Hong Kong. Even before Putin admitted this liaison on September 3, 2013, the CIA knew about it. In fact, on June 23rd, t, Senator Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), correctly said based on a White House briefing that "Vladimir Putin had personally approved Snowden's flight" to Moscow. As mentioned earlier, the NSA still had the capability to monitor Russian communication in June 2013. The messages, as well as the traffic, it intercepted from its sources reportedly revealed the Russian intelligence activity in Hong Kong. The NSA also reportedly intercepted contacts between these Russian officials and Russian representatives of Aeroflot, the Russian state-owned airline flying between Hong Kong and Moscow. Aeroflot, like most other international carriers, ordinarily requires international passengers to have both a valid passport and visa to the country of his destination. That those rules were waived for Snowden implicated Aeroflot in Snowden's exfiltration from Hong Kong. All of which meant to investigators that Snowden's defection to Moscow was not a haphazard result of unexpected circumstances. This raised new questions for the investigation. What led Snowden to defect to Russia? Was his arrival in Moscow planned by Russia intelligence in advance? Was any other party, such as China, privy to the plan? Was there a quid pro quo?

US intelligence had some clues suggesting that Snowden's path to Russia had been prepared for him in advance. On September 3, 2013, Russia's President Putin gave a lengthy interview on state-owned Channel 1 television in which he divulged that he personally had had advance knowledge of Snowden's plan. "I will tell you something I have never said before," Putin said. Snowden "first went to Hong Kong and got in touch with our diplomatic representatives" and that he was told then that an American "agent of special services" was seeking to come to Russia.

Putin then decided that this agent would be "welcome, provided, however, that he stops any kind of activity that could damage Russian-US relations." Putin's disclosure came as no surprise to the NSA investigation since the Russian pro-government newspaper *Kommersant* had reported that Snowden visited the Russian consulate in Hong Kong.

Putin's authorization could certainly account for Aeroflot waiving its usual passport and visa check to allow Snowden to board its plane. It also might explain the dispatch with which Russian officials whisked Snowden off the plane after it landed and into a waiting car at the Moscow airport. It could even account for Snowden's vanishing from public view for the next three weeks and the promulgation of the cover story that Snowden was unwillingly trapped at the airport by the U.S. government. The reasons behind Putin's move were less clear.

By September 2013, the investigation was looking into a veritable abyss. Snowden's culpability was no longer an issue. What was lacking from the video, or the 2-hour film made from it by Laura Poitras, was any specific information on how many documents he had copied, how he had obtained the passwords to the computers on which they were stored, the period of time involved in the theft, or how he had breached all the security measures of the NSA in Hawaii. Nor would that data be forthcoming from Snowden, who may be the only witness to the crime, By June 23, 2013, he was in a safe haven in Moscow. Even though the Grand Jury case against Snowden was cut and dry, it was also irrelevant because the US does not have an extradition treaty with Russia.

The purpose of the intelligence investigation went far beyond determining Snowden's guilt or innocence, however. Its job was to find out how such a massive theft of documents could occur, how the perpetrator escaped, and, perhaps most urgent, who had obtained the stolen documents from Snowden.

When Snowden first met Greenwald and Poitras in Hong Kong on June 3rd 2013, he displayed in his hand, as a recognition signal. It was an unsolved Rubik's Cube. It may also be an appropriate metaphor for the unsolved elements in the Snowden enigma. Even in his later interviews with journalists in Moscow, Snowden studiously avoided describing the means by which he breached the entire security regime of America's most secret intelligence service. He only told the journalists who came to Moscow to interview him, with a bit of pseudo-modesty, that he was not "an angel" who descended from heaven to carry out the theft.

But the question of how Snowden stole these documents may be the most important part of the story. The NSA, after all, furnishes communications intelligence to the President, his National Security advisers, and the Department of Defense that is supposedly derived from secret sources in adversary nations. If these adversary nations learn about the NSA's sources, the information, if not worthless, cannot be fully trusted. The most basic mission of the NSA is to protect its sources. Yet, despite all its efforts, Snowden walked away with long lists of its sources. In doing so, he amply demonstrated that a single civilian employee working for an outside contractor, even one not having the necessary passwords and other access privileges, could steal documents that betrayed these vital sources. He also demonstrated that such a theft, which the NSA calculates exceeded one million documents, can go undetected for at least two weeks. If Snowden managed this feat on his own, as he claims in his Hong Kong video, it suggests that any other civilian employee with a perceived grievance against NSA practices or American foreign policy could also walk away with some of the most precious secrets held by US intelligence. Such vulnerability extends to tens of thousands of civilian contract employees in positions similar to the one held by Snowden. The lone disgruntled employee explanation is therefore hardly reassuring. If true, calls into question the entire multi-billion dollar enterprise of outsourcing the management of the NSA's computer networks and other technical work to outside contractors. It also casts doubts on the post-9/11 decision by the intelligence community to strip away much of the NSA's "stove-piping" that previously insulated the NSA's most sensitive computers. Without such "stove-piping," any rogue civilian employee could bring down entire edifice of shared intelligence.

Nor would a finding by the investigation that Snowden had acted in concert with others in breaching compartments at the NSA be any more reassuring. Such collaboration among intelligence workers would reflect gravely on the mindset of the NSA. Snowden described an atmosphere in which intelligence workers exchanged lewd photographs of foreign suspects. Did this violation of the NSA's rules also involve abetting the theft of documents? If so, the NSA would have to evaluate further vulnerabilities that might arise when it entrusts its secrets to technicians who do not share is values. A collaborative breach would signal an immense failure of the present concept of the counterintelligence regime in the NSA.

From what I gathered from government officials who were familiar with the investigation, there was a concern that answering the "how" question could open up a Pandora Box of other issues concerning the very ability of the NSA to carry out its core mission of protecting the government's intelligence secrets. However it was organized, it was that clear that Snowden had played a major role in what amounted to a brilliant intelligence coup.

PART TWO

SNOWDEN’S ARC

“I woke this morning with a new name. I had had a vision. A dream vision. A vision righteous and true. Before me I saw Gamers shrouded in the glory of their true names...Step forth, and assume your name in the pantheon. It's always been there, your avatar's true name. It slips through your subconscious, reveals itself under your posts, and flashed visibly in that moment of unrestrained spite; in the indulgent teabag. You've felt it, known it, and recognized it. Now realize it.
I woke this morning with a new name. That name is … Wolfking Awesomefox”

--Edward Snowden in Geneva, June 12, 2008.

CHAPTER THREE

Tinker

> "It's like the boiling frog. You get exposed to a little bit of evil, a little bit of rule-breaking, a little bit of dishonesty… you can come to justify it."
>
> —Snowden in Moscow, 2014

Edward John Snowden was born on June 21, 1983 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. His parents, Lon Snowden and Elizabeth "Wendy" Barrett, according to their marriage records, wed when they were both 18 in 1979. The following year they had a daughter, Jessica.

Lon Snowden, like his father before him, served in the U.S. Coast Guard. He was stationed at its main aviation base, where his father-in-law Edward John Barrett, was an officer and rising star of the Coast Guard. While Edward Snowden was still a child, his grandfather would become not only an admiral but the head of the Coast Guard's entire aviation service. Admiral Barrett would be the only grandfather, Edward Snowden would ever know. His paternal grandfather died before he was born in a fatal car crash. He had had a drinking problem and killed a woman in a prior car crash.)

When Lon was transferred to a Coast Guard base near Baltimore in 1992, the family moved to Maryland. Lon bought a two-story house in Croften, Maryland, a residential community very close to the NSA's headquarters building at Fort Meade. The two children, Edward, who was nine, and Jessica, who was 12, were enrolled in local public schools in Croften.

Jessica was a top student. She graduated high school, completed both her courses at University of Maryland and went on to law school, where she graduated with honors. Unlike his sister, Snowden experienced a string of failures in his education. In 1998, after only one year of classes, he dropped out of Arundel High School. According to school records, he stopped attending classes at the age of fifteen. He later attributed his absence from school to a medical problem, mononucleosis, but according to Robert Mosier, a spokesman for Anne Arundel County public schools, there is no record of any medical illness. Brad Gunson, who knew him before he dropped out of high school, recalled in an interview with the *Washington Post* only that he had a high-pitched voice, liked magic cards, and played fantasy video games. Nor did Snowden receive home schooling or ever get a high school diploma.

Instead, Snowden became the product of a broken home. His parents were entangled in a messy divorce fight until he was seventeen. By this time Jessica had her own apartment. When his parents separated, Snowden's mother, Wendy, bought a two-bedroom condominium in Elliott City, Maryland. She moved Snowden, along with his two cats, into the condominium. She remained in the family house while awaiting its sale. According to his neighbor Joyce Kinsey, Snowden, alone, stayed home almost all the time. From what she could observe, he spent long hours in front of a computer screen.

At the age of 18, Snowden was still living by himself, while other teens his age went to college, Snowden now devoted a large part of his time playing fantasy games on the Internet. Posting under the alias "The TrueHooHa" on a web site called *Ars Technica*, he showed himself to be a passionate gamer. He was especially drawn to Anime, a graphically violent style of Japanese animation. These Anime games had by 2002 achieved a fanatic following in both Japan and the United States. He claimed special skills at Takken, a martial arts fighting game. He even went to Anime conventions in the Washington DC area. When he became a webmaster for Ryuhana Press, a website running these anime-based games, he described himself somewhat fancifully as a 37-year old father of two children, The only clearly true part of his description was that he was born on "the longest day of the year" (June 21).

He also apparently valued changing his body. He wrote Internet posts under his TrueHooHa alias about how he used weightlifting and intensive training to precision-shape his body. He bragged to his online followers that he had reduced his "body fat percentage to between 9.5% and 10.5%" (which was less than half of the average for his age.)

He appeared somewhat restless with his solitary life in a Maryland suburb in his almost daily postings. He expressed a longing to go to Japan. "I've always dreamed of being able to "make it" in Japan. I've taken Japanese for a year and a half," he posted in 2002. Despite his claim of learning Japanese, there is no record of him taking any courses in Japanese. But it perhaps part of his yearning. He also wrote that he wore "cool" purple sunglasses, practiced martial arts and was a fan of Japanese cuisine. He described himself at one point, as if advertising his virtues, as having a "head of vibrant, shimmering blond hair (with volume)." In pursuit of an employment opportunity in Japan, he posted "I'd love a cushy gov job over there." Eventually, he gave up on the idea of relocating himself to Japan because, as he explained in a post, he would have to put his cats in quarantine for six months.

Snowden's father meanwhile moved to Pennsylvania with his new wife-to-be. This left Snowden with only one male family member in the area, his maternal grandfather, Admiral Edward J. Barrett. Unlike Snowden's virtual career on the Internet, where at one point Snowden invented for himself two fantasy children, Admiral Barrett became a real actor in the top echelon of US intelligence. After the Coast Guard, he moved to the Pentagon. He was actually in the Pentagon when a plane piloted by terrorists crashed into it on 9-11. He emerged unscathed and, by 2004, was a top official in the intelligence regime that operated the interrogation center at Guantanamo.

Instead of seeking a job in Japan, Snowden sought to join the Special Forces through the 18X program. It was an Army Reserve program created in 2003 that allowed individuals who had not served in the military or completed their education, to train to be a Special Forces recruit. He listed his religion on the application as "Buddhist" because, as he explained in a sardonic post on *Ars Technica*, "Agnostic is strangely absent" from the form."

He enlisted in the army reserves on May 7, 2004, according to U.S. Army records. He reported for a 10 week basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. That was standard course for all enlistees in the infantry. In August, he began a three-week course in of parachute jumping but did not complete that training. US Army records show he did not complete the training requirements and received no commendations. As Snowden put it in his Internet postings, he "washed out." He was discharged on September 29, 2004, ending his 19 week military career. Snowden would later claim on the Internet that he returned to civilian life because he had injured himself by breaking both legs. An Army spokesman said, however, that he could not confirm that Snowden injured his legs or that he was in fact dropped from the program for medical reasons. Under his alias TheTrueHooHa he wrote that "they [the Army] held on to me until the doctors cleared me to be discharged, and then after being cleared they held onto me for another month just for shits and giggles." He attributed this treatment in the Army, as he would later attribute his problems in the CIA and NSA, to the inferior intelligence of his superiors, He wrote in his post "Psych problems = dishonorable discharge depending on how much they hate you. Lots of alleged homos were in the hold unit, too, but they only got a general discharge at best." It is not entirely clear whether or not Snowden actually injured himself. If he had broken his legs, it was not evident to Joyce Kinsey, his next door neighbor, who told me that she never saw Snowden on crutches when he returned to his mother's condominium in September 2004. Whether or not he broke his legs, Army records show that he did not receive a medical discharge. He received an "administrative discharge." Unlike a medical discharge which is given because a soldier has sustained injuries that prevent him from performing his duties, an administrative discharge is a "morally-neutral" form of separation given to a soldier when her or she is deemed for non-medical reasons inappropriate for military service. Snowden himself preferred to voice a medical explanation for his severance, just as he had claimed a medical reason for dropping out of high school (and would later claim he needed medical treatment for epilepsy at the NSA.)

When he returned home from Fort Benning, Georgia on September 28, 2004, he was 21. Having failed in his attempt to join the Special Forces, he returned to his mother's condominium in Elliott City, where he remained unemployed for several months. He took a job as a security guard at the University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language. According to his Ars Technica postings, he worked the night shift from six in the evening to six in the morning. Because intelligence officers took its language courses, Snowden had to take a polygraph exam to get the job. After he passed it, he was hired and given his first security clearance But he had higher ambitions than being a campus security guard, It was only a temporary stop gap for him.

He had ambitions of becoming a male model. He did not seem overly concerned about his privacy, posting pictures of himself "mooning" for the camera. He also posted provocative modeling pictures of himself on the *Ars Technica* website. He commented on his own beefcake-style pictures "So sexxxy it hurts" and "I like my girlish figure that attracts girls." He approached a model agency called Model Mania. He had some concern about the photographer who "shoots mostly guys." Snowden said in a post he was "a little worried he might, you know, try to pull my pants off and choke me to death with them, but he turned out to be legit and is a pretty damn good model photographer." He posted the photographs on the Internet, commenting: " I think I look pretty good in the shots, so it's kind of hard to get used to thinking of yourself in terms of being an element in a picture as opposed to just a picture of X." Despite his enthusiasm, the lack of any paid job offers dashed any hopes he had of a modeling career.

He also began dating Lindsay Mills around this time. She was an extremely attractive 19-year old art student at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Jonathan Mills, Lindsay's father, was an applications developer at the Oracle Corporation. According to him, she met Snowden on an Internet dating site. However they met, Snowden and Mills had much in common. They both had divorced parents who gave them a great deal of latitude in conducting their personal lives. Both of them were keenly interested in perfecting their bodies through exercise and diet regimes, Mills' only paid employment over the next 8 years would be as a fitness and Yoga instructor in Maryland. They both also had ambitions to be models and neither of them had inhibitions about posing provocatively for photographers. They both also had a desire to travel to exotic places, including cities in Asia. Mills had spent four month in Guilin, China before meeting Snowden.

As bleak as his prospects as a high school dropout may have seemed, he had an unexpected stroke of good fortune in the spring of 2006. The CIA, out-of-the-blue, offered Snowden a $66,000 a year job as a CIA communications officer. "I don't have a degree of ANY type. In fact, I don't even have a high school diploma," Snowden boasted in May 2006 on the website *Ars Technica* under his alias The TrueHooHa. He added, with only a slight exaggeration, "I make 70K."

But how did Snowden get the job? The CIA's minimum requirements in 2006 for a job in its clandestine division included a bachelor's or master's degree and a strong academic record, with a preferred GPA of 3.0 or better. Snowden had only completed one year of high school. He had never attended college. He said himself that he had "no degree." So he had none of the requisite degrees for the job he got.

CIA deputy director Ledgett said the CIA needed technical workers in 2006. But even if Snowden only applied in this capacity, which entailed a 5-year contract-term employment agreement, the minimum requirements for an intelligence technology job were a minimum of an Associates' Degree awarded by a two-year Community college in Electronics and Communications Engineering Technology Computer Network Systems, or Electronics Engineering Technology. Candidates further must have a final GPA of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale from a fully accredited technical school or university. Snowden did not meet these standards. Lacking these qualifications, the CIA can make an exception only if a candidate had at least two years civilian or military work experience in the telecommunications and/or automated information systems field that are comparable to one of the requisite degree fields. , Even here, Snowden in no way qualified. He did not have the education qualifications or two-year work experience anywhere. In fact, his only paid work was as a security guard at a language school at the University of Maryland, and that job lasted less than one year.

Under extraordinary circumstances, even the minimum requirements might be waived if the applicant had a distinguished military career and an honorable discharge. Snowden, however, did not complete his military training at Fort Benning, Georgia and received only an administrative discharge.

The CIA, to be sure, had needed computer savvy recruits to service its expanding array of computer systems since 1990. By 2006, however, there was no shortage of fully-qualified applicants for IT jobs who met the CIA's minimum standards. Most of them had university course records, work experience at IT companies, computer science training certificates from technical schools, and other such credentials they could provide the personnel office. The CIA, like the NSA, also obtained technicians with special skills for IT jobs from outside contractors. So it had no need for employing a 22-year old drop-out who did not meet its requisites. According to the former CIA station chief, the only plausible way that Snowden, with no qualifications, was allowed to jump the queue was that "he had some pull."

In 2006, Snowden was not without family connections. His grandfather, it will be recalled was Rear Admiral Barrett, who certainly was well-connected in the intelligence world. After 20 years service in the Coast Guard, Admiral Barrett joined an interagency task force in 1998, which included top executives from the CIA, FBI, and DEA. It had been set up to monitor any gaps in the US embargo on Cuba and, as one of its leaders, Barrett was in constant liaison with the CIA. Following the attack on the World Trade Center in NY in 2001, he joined the FBI as the section head of its aviation and special operations. In this capacity, he supervised the joint CIA/FBI interrogation of the prisoners in the Guantanamo base in Cuba which involved him in the rendition program for terrorist. As a top FBI executive in a liaison role with the CIA, he certainly had could have played a role in furthering his only grandson's employment. The CIA, however, has not disclosed any information about whom, if anyone, recommended Snowden. All that is known is that in 2006 the CIA waived its minimum requirements for Snowden.

However Snowden got his job at the CIA, it meant, as he pointed out from Moscow, that in 2006 his entire family was employed by the Federal government. His father Lon in 2006 was serving in the Coastguard; his mother Wendy was the administrative clerk for the Federal Court in Maryland; his sister Jessica was a research director at the Federal Judicial Center; and his namesake grandfather, Admiral Barrett, was still a top executive at the FBI. In a sense, Snowden had now entered the family business.

Chronology2: The Snowden Thriller

T*he Intelligence World, 2006-2014*

June2006-Feb 2007	CIA Trainee, Langley, Virginia
March 2007- Feb 2009	CIA Communications officer. Geneva, Switzerland
June 2009-Sept 2010	DELL/ NSA Security instructor, Yokoda. Japan
October 2010- March-2012	DELL/ NSA Computer platforms, Maryland–designing computer platforms
April 2012- March 2012	DELL/ NSA System administrator, Oahu, Hawaii
M arch 2012– May 2013	BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON/ NSA Infrastructure analyst, Oahu, Hawaii
October 2013– Present	Unidentified Cyber Security Firm Unknown position, Moscow, Russia

CHAPTER FOUR

Secret Agent

"Sure, a whistleblower could use these [computer vulnerabilities], but so could a spy."

--Edward Snowden in Moscow

The sudden transformation of Snowden in 2006 from a night watchman on a university campus to secret agent for the CIA provided him with a powerful new identity and one much closer to the avatars he adopted for his fantasy games. It was burnished so deeply in his self-image that he cited it eight years in Moscow. When Brian Williams, then a NBC anchorman, began an hour-long NBC television interview with Snowden in 2014 by saying, "It seems to me spies probably look a lot more like Ed Snowden and a lot less like James Bond these days," Snowden approvingly smiled and told him, "I was trained as a spy in sort of the traditional sense of the word." Snowden further confirmed his interviewer's point, sating "I lived and worked undercover overseas, pretending to work in a job that I'm not, and even being assigned a name that was not mine."

In reality, Snowden's employment at the CIA was more prosaic. When he joined the CIA in 2006, he did not have the required experience in maintaining secret communication systems. So the CIA sent him to its information technology school for six months to train as a communications officer, not a spy. After completing his training, he was dispatched to the CIA station in Geneva, Switzerland. He worked there for the next two years as one of dozens of Information Technologists servicing the CIA's communication channels in Switzerland. He was stationed there, according to Swiss registry records, under his own name from March 2007 to February 2009. He was identified as a US State Department employee in Geneva because Switzerland does not allow any intelligence officers to operate in that country. So officially he was attached to the permanent U.S. mission to the United Nations which employed hundreds of US government functionaries in Switzerland. It was a thin cover, since the Swiss government was aware that the CIA maintained its base in Geneva and posted it employees at the US mission,

Although he would later claim in the video he made in Hong Kong that he had served as a "senior adviser for the Central Intelligence Agency," he was merely a telecommunications support officer, or TSO in CIA parlance, which was a junior level job at the CIA. He worked as part of a 12 man team of information technologists under the supervision of senior CIA officers, according to a former CIA officer in Geneva. The job of these TSOs was to protect the security of the CIA's computer systems through which the CIA station in Geneva sent and received its secret communications. As far as is known, Snowden made very few friends at the 800-person mission. The only person there to have publicly reported knowing him in Geneva during this period is Mavanee Anderson, a young and attractive summer intern at the US Mission from May to August 2007. She described befriending Snowden, who, according to her, said that he was in the CIA and also demonstrated to her his martial arts skills. She later recalled in interviews that he was "a bit" prone to brooding and voiced growing dissatisfaction with the CIA.

During his time in Geneva, he received no promotions or commendations for his work. In December 2008, he received an unfavorable evaluation from his superior and a "derog," the CIA's shorthand for a derogatory comment. He was also threatened with a punitive investigation unless he agreed to quietly resign from the CIA. "It was not a stellar career," Tyler Drumheller, former CIA station chief told me in 2014.

The job in Geneva did have its benefits, however. It provided him a generous housing and travel allowance. In many ways, it was the "cushy government job" he had said he was seeking in his Internet posts. He rented a four room apartment and had his girlfriend Lindsay Mills, now 21, join him there.

According to his posts on the *Ars Technica* web site, he took full advantage of his compensation to live the high life. He gambled on financial developments in the option markets, losing and making substantial sums of money. He also bought a BMW sports car. While these BMW had a speed control to keep the car within the speed limit, he wrote that he illicitly disabled it so he could exceed this legal limit. He described in his posts other pursuits, including racing motorcycles it Italy and traveling around Germany with an Estonian rock star (who he did not further identify.) He also continued his fantasy life in Internet gaming. The gaming alias he chose was "Wolfking Awesomefox." He even indulged in a fantasy gun sport called Airsoft, a variation of paint ball, in which participants used realistic looking pistols to splatter each other with paint.

His good fortune came to an abrupt end in 2008. He suffered a massive loss in his options speculations. He wrote in a post that he had "lost $20,000 in October [2008] alone;" a sum which represented a substantial part of the $66,000 a year CIA salary. He blamed the US financial system, posting on *Ars Technica* that Ben Bernanke, the Federal Reserve chairman, was a "cockbag." He also bet against any further rise in the stock market index, asking a user with whom he was chatting on the *Ars Technica* site in December 2008 to "pray" for a collapse of stock prices. When his correspondent asked him why he wanted him to pray for a decline, Snowden responded "because then I'll be filthy fucking rich." The stock market, however, continued to rise, and Snowden also lost this bet.

Snowden lashed out at others on the Internet over these setbacks. He termed those who questioned his financial judgment as "fucking retards." As with other setbacks, he blamed them on government officials. He even advertised them in *Ars Technica,* a closely-watched Internet forum, while serving in the CIA. Since the CIA was engaged in 2008 in highly sensitive operations to gather banking data in Switzerland-- one of which Snowden later disclosed to the *Guardian*—any Internet discussion by a CIA employee of financial losses could serve as a beacon to an adversary intelligence services on the prowl for a source. If any party was looking for a disgruntled US employees, Snowden's Internet chatter about bad choices in gambling could arouse its interest. That Snowden used his TheTrueHooHa alias for these Internet posting would not prevent a sophisticated espionage organization, such as the Russian Intelligence service, from quickly uncovering that his true identity was Edward Snowden. Nor would it be difficult to place him at the CIA since, it will be recalled, he was listed by his true name on the roster of the US Mission to the UN. By consulting personnel records it would further emerge that he did not actually work for the State Department. Since it was no secret, at least to the Russian Intelligence services, that the US mission in Geneva housed the CIA station for all of Switzerland, it was probable that this brittle gambler who played the options market worked for the CIA. Even though it cannot be precluded that Snowden was spotted in Geneva by another intelligence service, there is no evidence, at least that I know of, to suggest that he was approached by one. Nor is there reason to believe that if he had been contacted by a foreign service in 2008, he would have responded positively. Despite his indiscreet posting about his outside activities, he apparently still respected the boundaries of secrecy that had been clearly defined in the oath he had taken in the CIA. For example, after the *New York Times* published an article revealing secret American intelligence activities in Iran on January 11, 2009, Snowden railed against the newspaper on the Internet under his True HOOHA alias, He wrote "This shit is classified for a reason… It's because this shit won't work if Iran knows what we are doing." He clearly recognized that revealing intelligence sources was extremely damaging. As for the *New York Times*, he said "Hopefully they'll finally go bankrupt this year." When another Internet user asked him if it was unethical to release national security secrets, he answered,"YEEEEEEEEEES."

Nevertheless, he had his career-ending problem at the CIA. As with every CIA officer, he had to undergo a two year evaluation and take a routine polygraph test. It was then, in December 2008, that his superior at the CIA placed the "derog" in his file. The reason remains somewhat murky. According to a New *York Times* story by veteran intelligence reporter Eric Schmitt, Snowden's superior had suspected that Snowden "was trying to break into classified computer files to which he was not authorized to have access." Schmitt evidently had well-placed sources in the CIA. He said that he interviewed two senior American officials who were familiar with the case. According to what they told Schmitt, the CIA superior had decided to "send Snowden home." Officially, however, according to a CIA reply to the *New York Times* report, Snowden had not been fired or accused of attempting to "break into classified computer files to which he did not have authorized access." The discrepancy was explained to me by a former CIA officer who had also been at the US Mission in Geneva. He said that the spin the CIA put on the story was "necessary containment." After the Snowden breach occurred in June 2013, the CIA had a problem which could, as he put it, "blow up in its face." If Snowden had been fired but allowed to keep his secrecy clearance in 2009, the CIA's incompetency could be partly blamed for the NSA's subsequent employment of him. If he had broken into a computer he was not authorized, he should have been fired, if not arrested. What this spin glossed over, according to this former CIA officer, is the part of Snowden's behavior that concerned his superior. Technically, Snowden, as a CIA communications officer, was authorized to use the computer system. The problem was that Snowden had deliberately misused it by adding code to it. This code could have compromised the security of the CIA's "live system." So while what the CIA public affairs officer said was correct, it clouded the issue.

For his part, Snowden blamed his career-ending "derog" on an "e-mail spat" with a superior. From Moscow, he wrote James Risen of the *New York Times* that his superior officer ordered him not "to rock the boat." Further, he complained that the technical team at the CIA station in Geneva had "brushed him off" even though he had a legitimate complaint. When he complained about a flaw in the computer system, he said that his superior took vengeance on him. He said he added the code to the system prove he was right. He attributed the "derog" in his file to the incompetence, blindness and errors of his superiors. According to Snowden, he was a victim. This would not be the last time he faulted superiors for their incompetency. He would later say that the NSA experts who examined the documents that he had stolen as "totally incapable."

In any case, in February 2009, Snowden not only had a career-damaging "derog" in his file but he faced an internal investigation of his suspicious computer activities. According to Tyler Drumheller, the former CIA chief for Europe, such an internal investigation was not undertaken lightly or because of an "email spat." He said that such an investigation was "a big deal" involving the CIA Office of Security in Washington and possibly the FBI. It would also result in the temporary suspension of his secrecy clearance. This left Snowden with little choice. If he wanted avoid the investigation, he had to resign from the CIA, which he did. That was the end of the security investigation. He was clearly bitter about the CIA, posting on *Ars Technica* on January 10, 2009, "Obama just appointed a fucking POLITICIAN to run the CIA!" (He was referring to Leon Panetta, President Clinton's former chief of staff.) Snowden attributed the origins of his antipathy to US intelligence to his 2007-2009 experiences in the CIA. Snowden later told *Vanity Fair* that the 2009 incident in the CIA convinced him that working "through the system would lead only to reprisals." "Much of what I saw in Geneva really disillusioned me about how my government functions and what its impact is in the world," he told the *Guardian* in June 2013. "I realized that I was part of something that was doing far more harm than good." Snowden, if not yet a ticking time bomb, was certainly a disgruntled intelligence worker before he ever got to the NSA

CHAPTER FIVE

Contractor

> "Private contractors don't clear employees. The government does."--
> Admiral Michael McConnell, Vice Chairman of Booz Allen Hamilton

Snowden, age 26, returned from Europe and moved into his mother's condo. He was not only unemployed now, having resigned the CIA without qualifying for any benefits, but his financial state had been hurt by the huge losses he had suffered playing the options market in Geneva. His vision of himself as a secret agent, the unstoppable "Wolfking Awesomefox" may have also suffered. According to the narrative he later supplied to the *Guardian*, he had become deeply concerned about the immoral way in which the CIA conducted its intelligence operations in Switzerland. "Much of what I saw in Geneva really disillusioned me about how my government functions and what its impact is in the world. I realized that I was part of something that was doing far more harm than good," Snowden told the *Guardian.* By way of example, he said he learned that the CIA had gotten a Swiss banker drunk enough arrested to be arrested when he drove, so the CIA could compromise him. Snowden, who did not drink himself, was appalled at this ploy. Despite his growing antagonism towards the US government, he had not given up on, if not becoming a secret agent, working in the netherworld of secret intelligence.

Although Snowden's career had abruptly ended at the CIA, there still was a backdoor through which he could re-enter the spy world. It was private corporations that hired civilian technicians to work for spy agencies as independent contractors. By 2009, The CIA, NSA and other US intelligence services had outsourced much of the job of maintaining and upgrading their computer systems to these private companies. They supplied the NSA with most of its system administrators and other information technology workers. This arrangement allowed the NSA to effectively bypass budget limits and other restrictions limiting how many NSA technicians it could recruit. Instead, of putting these workers on its own payroll, they nominally worked for, and received their paychecks from, private employers. In fact, many of these outside contractors worked full-time for the NSA.

Snowden applied in April 2009 to one of these private companies, Dell SecureWorks. It was a subsidiary of the Dell computer company. To diverse out of manufacturing computers, Dell had recently gone into the business of managing government computer systems for the NSA and other intelligence services. As a leading specialist in the field of corporate cyber security, Dell had no problem obtaining sizable contracts for from the NSA's Technology Directorate. In 2008, the NSA had in effect outsourced to Dell the task of re-organizing its back-up systems at its regional bases. Now Dell had to find thousands of independent contractors to work at these bases In 2009, when Snowden applied, Dell was seeking to fill positions at the NSA's regional base in

Japan. It first had to find technicians willing to go to Japan. Since Snowden had a long-time interest in going to Japan, he was more than willing to relocate to Japan.

He had little problem obtaining the job. Aside from his family connections, he had a single compelling qualification for the job—a top secret clearance. For an outside contractor such as Dell, such a security clearance was pure gold. If a potential recruit lacked a top secret clearance, before Dell could deploy him or her at the NSA, it needed a wait for the completion of a time-consuming background check. If a recruit already had one, as Snowden did, he could begin working immediately.

The reason that Snowden still had his secrecy clearance, despite his highly-problematic exit from the CIA, was that the CIA had instituted a policy a few years earlier that allowed voluntarily-retiring CIA officers to keep their secrecy clearance for two years after they left. This "free pass," as one former CIA officer called the two year grace period, had been intended to make it easier for retiring officers to find jobs in parts of the defense industry that required secrecy clearance. This accommodation, in turn, made it easier for the CIA to downsize to meet its budget.

Not only did Snowden retain his security clearance, but unlike when he had applied for his job at the CIA in 2006, he now could list on his resume two years experience in information technology and cyber security at the CIA. All Dell could check was a single fact: Snowden was indeed employed at the CIA between 2006 and 2009. His CIA file, which contained the "derog," was not available to Dell or any other private company. Even though the CIA had "security concerns" about Snowden, as CIA Deputy Director Morell noted, it could not convey them to either Dell or the NSA. "So the guy with whom the CIA had concerns left the Agency and joined the ranks of the many contractors working in the intelligence community before CIA could inform the rest of the IC about its worries," Morell explained. "He even got a pay raise." Obviously, this was a glitch in the security system but, as a result of it, Snowden entered the NSA by the back door only five months after being forced out of the CIA.

For the next 45 months Dell assigned him various IT tasks at the NSA. In June 2009, he was sent to Japan to work in the NSA complex at the Yokota air base outside Tokyo. He moved into a small one bedroom apartment in the nearby town of Fussia. His initial job for Dell was teaching cyber security to Army and Air Force personnel. In this capacity, he instructed US military officers stationed at the base in how to shield their computers from hackers. Such security training had been required for military personnel dealing with classified material after several successful break-ins to US military networks by China, Russia, and other adversary nations. Although it finally brought him to Japan, it was not a challenging or interesting job.

But Snowden found diversions in Japan. In July 2009, he was joined in Japan by Lindsay Mills. She had become an amateur photographer, specializing in arty self portraits. She also saw herself as a global tourist, writing in her blog after arriving in Japan that had she travelled to 17 countries. Like Snowden, she also deemed herself, tongue and cheek, a "super hero." In this sense, her Internet avatar, was a match for Snowden's "Wolfking Awesomefox,"

In Japan, Mills and Snowden spent time with another American couple, Jennie and Joseph Chamberlin, who also worked at the Yokota base. Jennie, a sergeant in the public affairs section of the US Air force, had been at Art College with Mills, and called herself in her blog the "Little Red Ninja." Her husband, Joseph Chamberlin was a decorated US Navy pilot who now flew highly-sensitive intelligence-gathering missions from the Yokota base. When Lindsay Mills arrived she made contact with Jennie, who in the next few weeks showed her many of the sights of Tokyo. Jennie described Lindsay in her blog as her "super-model friend." The two couples also went on expeditions in Japan together. Joseph Chamberlin had a car and, as far as is known, he and his wife were the only Americans at the base with whom Snowden socialized. On August 17, 2009, the foursome attempted to walk up Mount Fuji, but they got lost en route to the tourist site. Giving up on Mount Fuji, they wound up in the Mount Fuji gift shop. Jennie described the misadventure in her Little Red Ninja blog: "Our adventure started off a little rocky with our attempts to find the interstate. Alas, our iconic mountain was obscured by cloud. A short stop at the Mt. Fuji combination soba noodle stand/gift shop was enough to whet our appetite for the further exploration that is to come." The photographs that day show Snowden wearing Hawaiian shorts, and a black tank top emblazoned with an eagle and the letters USA. They also show Mills wearing safari shorts, a brown sweater and what appears to be an engagement ring (possibly to allay suspicions about her living with Snowden.) "Ed was looking rather rednecky," Lindsay commented on one the photograph. Snowden described her, in turn, as "nerdy." Finally, after posing for photographs, they found the Suyama-guchi path. But they never made it to the top.

Back in Tokyo, Snowden was still seeking to advance himself. He attempted to get a college certificate by enrolling in a summer on-line course at the University of Maryland's Asia program. But, according to the program's record, he did not succeed in receiving any credit or a certificate from the on-line University.

Finally, in October 2009, Dell assigned Snowden a job in which he had direct access to the NSA's computers. His new position was a system administrator, which is essentially a tech-savvy repairman. Dell was working on backup system code-named EPIC SHELTER. For this contract, Dell was transferring large chunks of data from the NSA's main computers in Maryland to back-up drives in Japan so if there was a communications interruption the system could be quickly restored. Since most of the classified data was in its encrypted form, it had little value to any outside party. Snowden's job was to maintain the proper functioning of computers but, as a system administrator, he also had privileges to call up unencrypted files. He sat in front of a computer screen all day looking for any problems in the transferring files to back-up servers. The work was highly-repetitive and exceedingly dull. Snowden found time to search for anomalies in the system and he claimed to have spotted a major flaw in the security system in late 2009. The flaw was that a system administrator in Japan worked as a singleton and could steal secret data without anyone else realizing that it had been stolen. It intrigued him enough for him to bring it to the attention of his superiors, as he later said. Snowden saw that a rogue system administrator like himself could use his computer privileges to download and steal documents in ways that would go unnoticed. The emergence of a rogue system administrator was not that farfetched in 2009. Hacktavists such as Julian Assange had adopted the battle cry: system administrators, or "syst admins of the world unite." Instead of asking them to "throw off their chains," as Marx did, he asked them to send classified documents about secret government activity to the Wikileaks site. Snowden recalled in Moscow in 2014: "I actually recommended they [the NSA] move to two-man control for administrative access back in 2009." To make his point even clearer, he added: "A whistleblower could use these things, but so could a spy." Not without irony, Snowden himself became that rogue system administrator some three years later at Dell. In fact, he later used the vulnerability he pointed out to steal NSA documents at Dell (before moving to Booz Allen.).

In September 2009, Snowden made a ten day trip to India. He later said he was on an official visit "working at the US embassy." He was still on the Dell payroll. Hotel records show that he arrived at the Hyatt Regency hotel in New Delhi on September 2nd from Japan, and at 3:30 pm on September 3rd, checked into the Koenig Inn, a facility that was an annex to Koenig Solutions, a school that gave crash courses on programming and computer hacking. According to Rohit Aggarwal, the head of the school, Snowden stayed there until September 10th while taking classes with a private instructor. It cost $2,000 in tuition and fees, which Snowden prepaid from Japan with his own personal credit card. Even though Snowden later said he only took courses in "programming," the school's records show that during that week he took intensive courses in sophisticated hacking techniques. Although the course was entitled "ethical hacking" that was also a euphemism for teaching the techniques of illicit hacking. The course provided tutoring on hacker's tools, such as "Spyeye" and "ZeuS," that are used to circumvent security procedures. It also demonstrated how these hacking tools could be customized by criminals and spies to break into files, plant surveillance programs, impersonate system administrators, assume the privileges of system administrators in a network, and capture the passwords of others. On September 11th, Snowden, according to hotel records, left India for Japan. While the stated purpose of the hacking training was to allow security consultants to detect intruders, it also prepared Snowden to be, if he chooses to be, an intruder in the NSA system.

One problem with working as a contractor is that the standard two-year contracts are not necessarily renewed, making a contractor's job essentially temporary employment. Nor is there much possibility for advancement for IT workers. As one contractor told me "It is a dead end job with great pay." In the fall of 2010, Snowden's contract in Japan with Dell SecureWorks came to an end. Dell then offered Snowden a new position in the United States.

He now was assigned to work at Dell headquarters in Annapolis, Maryland. He rented a modest suburban house shaded by a Sakura cherry tree in suburb of Annapolis, Maryland. Mills meanwhile was attending a two-week fitness training course at a Yoga camp that qualified her to be a yoga instructor. She then moved in with Snowden. Even though she had been living on and off with Snowden during the past two years abroad, including while he worked at the CIA in Switzerland and the NSA in Japan, they had not shared a home in America up until now. The now 25-year old Mills posted on Instagram "Finally in our first US place together." She also put on line pictures of him in bed with her, who she now affectionately referred to in her posts as a "computer crusader."

Dell meanwhile had him to work on problem- solving for its corporate clients. In preparation for his corporate role, he shaved off this facial hair and, with Lindsay's help, bought a Ralph Lauren suit. These corporate clients were assisting the NSA, the CIA, and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). Consequently, Snowden dealt with a wide range of intelligence officers, and gave presentations on the vulnerabilities at computer security at the DIA-sponsored Joint Counter Intelligence seminar.

His dealings with these US intelligence officers in no way mitigated his resentment of the intelligence establishment. What began at the CIA in 2009 as objections to what he saw as the incompetence of his superiors grew into well-articulated disapproval of the way that the US government conducted its intelligence. He found NSA surveillance particularly worrisome, later telling the *Guardian*: "They [the NSA] are intent on making every conversation and every form of behavior in the world known to them." He claimed after defecting to Moscow that he had voiced his concerns about what he considered illicit surveillance to ten NSA officials, "none of whom took any action to address them." The NSA can find no record of these complaints but if Snowden had indeed complained to these officials while working for Dell, his superiors at Dell either didn't notice or care that they had a very disgruntled employee on their hand. He also made no secret of anger at the US government and the corporations that served it on the Internet. He railed on the *Ars Technica* site against the complicity of private corporations, such as Dell, that assisted the NSA. In his on-line posts in 2010, Snowden expressed loathing for the assistance that corporate America was providing the intelligence community. "It really concerns me how little this sort of corporate behavior bothers those outside of technology circles," he wrote under his True Hoo-ha alias. He said he feared that America was already on "a slippery slope," and suggested, perhaps adumbrating his own later actions, that this corporate assistance to US intelligence "was entirely within our control to stop." What the "computer crusader," as Mills had playfully called him in her Internet postings, expressed in these angry Internet postings was an almost obsessive concern over individuals freely submitting to government authority. "Society really seems to have developed an unquestioning obedience towards spooky types," he wrote on *Ars Technica* without mentioning that he himself worked for a corporation, Dell that assisted spy agencies. He asked rhetorically on this public forum whether the sinister slide towards a surveillance state "sneaked in undetected because of pervasive government secrecy?"

The outright contempt he expressed towards this "government secrecy" in no way prevented him from seeking even more secret work at Dell for the intelligence services. In February 2011, after his CIA security clearance ran out, he applied to renew it. A new clearance required a new background check and filling out (again) the government's 127-page standard form 86.

Since 1996, background investigations for the NSA, like much of the computer work at the NSA, had been outsourced to a private company. It had proceeded from the effort of the Clinton Administration to cut the size of the government by privatizing tasks that could be more efficiently done by for profit companies. US Investigations Services, or USIS as it is now called, which won the contract for background checks, was initially owned by the hedge fund Carlyle Group who later sold it to another hedge fund, Providence Equity Partners. For the hedge funds, profits were the measure of success. To increase its profits from the contract with the NSA, USIS had to move more quickly in concluding background checks since it did not get paid more extensive investigation. In 2006, the government learned USIS's background checks were often prematurely ended. In Snowden's case, as USIS did not have access to Snowden's CIA personnel files, it did not learn about the pending security investigation of him. Nor did it learn from the Internet that he was a disgruntled employee. So Snowden's new clearance was approved in the summer of 2011, allowing him to continue working for Dell on secret intelligence projects.

Meanwhile, in August 2011, Mills began her own blog entitled "L's Journey." In it, she described herself as "a world-traveling pole-dancing super hero." By now, she was an accomplished photographer, specializing in taking self-portraits. Many of her posted pictures were provocative poses of herself in her underwear and various states of undress. She wrote: "I've always wanted to be splashed on the cover of magazines, with my best air-brushed look." Her wish would be gratified two years later in way she did not anticipate.

For his part, Snowden seemed happy to encourage her fantasy about being a super hero. He even gave her a Star-Trek-inspired head visor. Despite all the concerns he voiced about privacy, he did not seem to mind her provocative posts. On the contrary, he took photographs of her, telling her, at one point, that her photographs were not "sexy" enough.

Snowden meanwhile got offered by Dell a new position at an NSA Kunia regional base in Hawaii. Dell, which was in the process of expanding its government consulting business, wanted him to be a system administrator on the NSA's back-up system. The NSA needed this system before it could upgrade new security protocols that would audit suspicious activity in real time. In Hawaii, as in Japan, system administrators still worked as singletons. As Snowden had seen when working in Japan this solo work in an unaudited workplace provided an opportunity for a system administrator like himself to steal documents. So he may have also realized that as a solo system administrator in Hawaii, he would have this opportunity.

In any case, on March 15, 2012, he accepted the offer. Dell agreed to pay all his relocation expenses and provide him with a housing allowance.

He found a 3-bedroom house in Hawaii on-line, and arranged to move there on April 2, 2012. 1t was located at 94-1044 Eleu Street in the upper-middle class suburb of Waipahu, only a few blocks from the Royal Kunia country club. It had a master bedroom with a walk-in closet, a patio deck in back shielded from public view by a clump of palm trees and a large garage with an automatic door. The move to Hawaii entailed a brief separation from his girlfriend since Mills had committed her to attending her girlfriend's wedding in May. After he left for his new assignment, she wrote on Instagram, "Sex toy party and then saying goodbye to my man -- well not goodbye so much as see you in two month/s."

CHAPTER SIX

Thief

“We begin by coveting what we see every day”

—Hannibal Lecter, *The Silence of the Lambs*

In Hawaii in 2012, Snowden was living a very comfortable life. He was earning from Dell just over $120,000 a year. His housing allowance from Dell paid the rent on his 1,559 square-foot house. He had also leased a sporty car. Looking back at this period of life from Moscow, he said he had been “living in paradise.”

He went to work five times a week, a 15 minute trip drive through a lush landscape with sugar plantations. After passing through security, he parked his car in a sprawling parking lot, and entered the underground part of the NSA base known as “the tunnel.” He said in describing the atmosphere, “You’re in a vaulted space. Everybody has sort of similar clearances, everybody knows everybody. It’s a small world.” He said that to relieve the tediousness of the work, every two months or so his fellow workers would pass around a naked picture that showed up on their screens. He explained: “You've got young enlisted guys, 18 to 22 years old [who] suddenly been thrust into a position of extraordinary responsibility where they now have access to all of your private records. In the course of their daily work they stumble across … an intimate nude photo of someone in a sexually compromising position.” Snowden, as will be recalled, was no stranger to posting lewd photographs. Before he joined the CIA, he had posted pictures of himself mooning on the Internet. He also knew that copying any files, including photographs, was a violation of NSA rules. But he did not report this illicit activity at the NSA even though he later claimed that it occurred regularly. He joked in his Moscow interview with the *Guardian* that some of the nudes were “extremely attractive” and that viewing them was, as he put it, “a sort of the fringe benefits of surveillance positions.”

Snowden also had an interest in American politics. He identified with the Libertarian Party, and at the NSA he made no effort to conceal his political support of its causes. He became an active partisan of Congressman Ron Paul, the leading figure in the Libertarian Party in 2012. “He's so dreamy,” Snowden posted on the *Ars Technica* site in March 2009 (just after he registered to vote in North Carolina.) Since Paul was running as a Presidential candidate in the 2012 Republican primaries, Snowden sent the Paul election committee a contribution of $500. Snowden’s attraction to the Libertarian ideology of Ron Paul was not that surprising. At the core of Paul’s libertarianism was a deep hostility to the intrusion of the government into private lives. Snowden shared this same hostility towards government authority, as was clear from his Internet postings. Like other libertarians, Snowden believed that citizens should not be shackled by

Federal law. He later told a Libertarian gathering, at which Ron Paul also spoke, "Law is a lot like medicine. When you have too much it can be fatal." Paul also ardently opposed any form of gun control. Not only did Snowden support this position in his Internet postings, but so did his girlfriend Lindsay Mills in her own on-line postings.

Most relevant to his future activities at the NSA, Snowden whole-heartedly agreed with the position of Paul on the dangers inherent in government's surveillance of US citizens. Paul described the CIA, the organization which had forced Snowden out, as nothing short of a "secret government" and that "In a true Republic, there is no place for an organization like the CIA." He also railed against NSA surveillance.

As is clear from Snowden's Internet postings, he, like Ron Paul, expressed doubts about the competency of the intelligence agencies of the U.S. government. Snowden's own disillusionment about the government may have begun with his rejection, and perceived mistreatment, by the Special Forces of the US Army. It was almost certainly reinforced by his ouster from the CIA. He later told the *Guardian* that he was disillusioned as early as 2007 when he learned about the CIA's methods in compromising Swiss citizens. He also told the *New York Times* after he arrived in Moscow that he came to realize while working in the CIA that any attempt redress these wrongs against him by working through the system would only lead to further punishment for him. His critical view of the US government only hardened during the years he worked at the NSA. He described his NSA superiors as "grossly incompetent," as he later explained to a journalist from *Wired* magazine in Moscow. At the NSA, he said employees were kept in line by "fear and a false image of patriotism." He said that he saw his fellow workers cowed into "obedience to authority" and his superiors induced to break the law. He became particularly concerned with what he called the "secret powers" of the NSA. He saw them as "tremendously dangerous." By this time, Snowden was fully aware that that the NSA conducted domestic surveillance because he had used his privileges as a system administrator in 2012 to obtain the NSA's inspector general's report on a 2009 surveillance program.

Nevertheless, Snowden continued to work at the NSA, where he was, as he put it, "making a ton of money." Mills joined him in his "paradise" in June 2012, shortly before his 29th birthday. Just before leaving Annapolis, Maryland for Hawaii, Mills posted a semi-nude picture of herself on her blog, "L's Journey." In it, her face was covered with a blanket. The caption under it read: "Trying to avoid the changes coming my way." In Honolulu, she found "E," as she called Snowden in her blog, "elusive." She found that he preferred to stay at home and avoided meeting other people to the point that her friends "were not quite sure that E. existed." At best, one of Lindsay's friends in an acrobatic class caught a glimpse of Snowden picking her up one afternoon. Even though Mill's dated Snowden for eight years, most of her friends, with the exception of Jennie and Joe Chamberlin in Japan, had never met Snowden. If he had other social interactions in Hawaii, no one he met came forward and spoke of meeting him even after he became world famous.

Two days after his 29th birthday dinner on June 21st, she described him playfully as a "goof." She wrote in her blog:"The universe is telling me something and I'm pretty sure it's saying get out, Fuck you Hawaii." In early July, she summed up her shaky situation with Snowden, in another blog, writing: "I moved to Hawaii to continue my relationship with E. [but] it has been an emotional roller coaster since I stepped off the plane." She also found it odd that Snowden would work on his computer at home hooded under a blanket, as she would later tell the FBI. She diverted herself by organizing a pole dancing studio in the 400 foot garage of the house. She also joined a New Age yoga studio called "Physical Phatness," a local acrobatic performance group, and, on Friday nights, pole-danced at the Mercury lounge in downtown Honolulu.

That same July, Snowden had other things on his mind, including an attempt to advance himself. Although his position at Dell as a system administrator was a well-compensated one, especially for a 29 year old with no formal education, it carried little prestige. He sat from 9 AM to 5 PM in a windowless room watching a bank of monitors in the so-called "tunnel" at the NSA. Many of those who worked him were, as he described them, "eighteen year old soldiers. Presumably, they had little interest in discussing with him the weightier issues of the world. Working as an outside contractor was also a dead-end job that hardly matched the vision he had of himself in his Internet postings. In real life in a cubicle in the NSA, he decidedly was not the "Wolfking Awesomefox" heroic image he had of himself in his dream vision.

Whatever his motive, he decided to apply for a position in the NSA itself. He apparently believed that if he scored high enough in its entrance exam, the NSA would invite him to join it as a Senior Executive Service officer, or SES, which was the civilian equivalent in rank and pay to a flag officer in the US armed forces. To achieve this SES job, Snowden used his privileges as a system administrator at Dell to hack into the NSA's administrative files and steal the answers to the NSA exam. As the NSA's subsequent post mortem would find out, it was the first known document that Snowden took at the NSA. But it was not the first time he had used his hacking skills to attempt to advance himself. At the CIA in 2009, as he late said in Moscow, he had added text to his annual evaluation in what he termed "a non-malicious way" to prove a point. His CIA superior took a much darker view of that incident when the hack was detected, calling for an investigation that, it will be recalled, ended Snowden's CIA career. At the NSA his intrusion, however, was not detected for almost a year. "He stole the [NSA] test with the answers, and he took the test and he aced it," former NSA Director Michael McConnell recounted in a 2013 interview, "He then walked into to the NSA and said you should hire me because I am this good on the test." The issue of why he attempted to gain entry into the upper ranks of the NSA in the late summer of 2012 is less clear. If his Internet posting and Libertarian riffs are an indication of his state of mind in 2012, he was hostile to the surveillance activities of the NSA. If so, it made little sense he would seek a permanent career in the NSA. If this attempted career is considered in light of the career move he made six months later in March 2013 which, as he himself admits, was for the express purpose of getting at tightly-held documents stored on computers that were not available to him in his job at Dell, he may have been seeking wider access in 2012 for a more nefarious purpose than a NSA job.

In any case, despite the near-perfect high grades he scored, the NSA did not offer him a position in the senior executive service job. While Snowden may have believed such results would elevate him, the NSA's offer did not meet his expectations. "It was totally unrealistic for Snowden to expect to get a SES position," a former senior NSA officer told me. Snowden ambitions may have been disappointed in this instance, but it did not prevent him from later claiming that he had been a senior adviser to the CIA and also a senior adviser to the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Instead of an SES position, the NSA offered a lowly G-13 job as an information technology worker, which was not an improvement on his job at Dell. He took this slight as evidence of the NSA's incompetence, subsequently joking to a reporter in Moscow that his ability to steal the test answers should have been seen as a qualification for the NSA job. In September 2012, he turned down the NSA offer. If he was to advance himself now, he had to find a new way.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Crossing the Rubicon

"What I came to feel is that a regime that is described as a national security agency has stopped representing the public interest and has instead begun to protect and promote state security interests. "

--Edward Snowden, interviewed in Moscow 2014

Soon after Snowden failed to get a SES job at the NSA, he intensified his rogue activities. At that time, Dell was tasked with building an enhanced backup system for the NSA in Hawaii. Deputy Director Ledgett explained that part of Snowden's job as a system administrator under contract to Dell was transferring files held at Fort Meade to back-up computers in Hawaii. He "was moving copies of that data there for them, which was perfect cover for stealing the [NSA] data." Snowden took advantage of this cover.

Snowden expanded his own rogue operation, as Ledgett reconstructed the breach, through the fall and winter of 2012. There was little risk of him getting caught. The security measures at the Hawaii base presented no obstacles to him since, as a system administrator, he had privileges that allowed him to copy documents that had not been encrypted. Indeed, it was part of the process of building the backup system. The flaw he had pointed to in Japan in which system administrators working solo could safely steal files also existed in Hawaii. This time, however, instead of bringing it to the attention of the NSA, he used it to himself steal files. He could be confident that his 2012 thefts of documents would go undetected because the NSA's base had not yet installed an auditing system. Such real-time auditing of the movement of documents, which was done at NSA headquarters in Fort Meade and most of the NSA's regional facilities, had not yet been installed at the Hawaii base because a lack of bandwidth prevented the safe upgrading of the software. This auditing software was scheduled to be installed after the backup system was completed in 2013. The Kunia base was one of the last NSA bases which did not monitor suspicious transfers of files on a real-time basis. Snowden certainly was certainly aware of this deficiency. He later pointed out in his interview in *Wired* magazine in Moscow that the NSA base where he worked did not have an "audit" mechanism. This security gap allowed Snowden, using his system administrator's credentials, to copy classified data to a thumb drive without anyone being able to trace the copied data back to him. And, according to the NSA's subsequent damage assessment, he stole many thousands of pages while working for Dell in 2012 before he contacted journalists. Deputy Director Ledgett subsequently reported that the NSA analysis the 58,000 documents that were given by Snowden to journalists in June 2013 showed that most of them were taken by Snowden while he was still working at Dell.

This 2012 theft was made even more serious by the interconnection of NSA computers with those of other intelligence agencies. It will be recalled that prior to the 9/11 attack in 2001, NSA data had been protected by "stove-piping" that separated NSA' computers from networks used by other intelligence services. After the 9/11 Commission concluded that part of the reason why US intelligence agencies were unable to "connect the dots" in advance of the attack was because this "stove-piping, the NSA stripped away a large part of its "stove-piping." One result was that the NSANet, which Snowden had access to at Dell in 2012, became a shared network. It had common access points. General Hayden described them to me as the equivalent of "reading rooms" in a library. They served as a means for NSA workers to exchange ideas about the problems they were encountering on various projects for the intelligence community. In maintaining them, system administrators, or "system admins," like Snowden acted as the "librarians." If a stem administrator copied data from this network, no one knew.

For Snowden, the NSANet, which included CIA and Defense Department documents, provided a rich hunting ground for Snowden in the fall and winter of 2012. Many of the documents he took off the NSANet revealed not only operations of the NSA but also those of the CIA and Pentagon. By taking them he had come to a Rubicon from which there would be no return. He later explained in an email to *Vanity Fair* from Moscow, "I crossed that line."

As far as is known, he was not sharing them with any other party prior to May 2013. He was not even yet in contact with Poitras, Greenwald or any other journalists. Presumably, Snowden was collecting them drives, despite the risks that possessing such a collection of secrets might entail, for some future use.

But why would Snowden jeopardize his career and, if caught, his freedom, by undertaking this illicit enterprise? He may have had by now strong ideological objections the NSA's global surveillance. As he said later in Moscow, "we're subverting our security standards for the sake of surveillance." But ordinarily even ideologically-opposed employees don't steal state secrets and risk imprisonment. If they are disgruntled, they seek employment elsewhere. Certainly, Snowden, with his three years experience working for Dell, would have little problem finding a job as an IT worker in the booming civilian sector of computer technology. Instead of resigning, he sought to widen his access to NSA documents. This behavior suggests to me that he had another agenda. One possible clue to it is the first document he took; the NSA exam. The secret in that document, the answers to the questions, were a form of power to him: power to burrow deeper into the executive structure of the NSA. It would unlock the door to door to even the more powerful documents containing the NSA's sources stored in Level 3 compartments. His later actions demonstrated that he equated the possession of such secrets with personal power. For example, after he arrived in Moscow in 2013, he bragged to James Risen of the *New York Times* that he had access to secrets that gave him great leverage over the NSA. He told him specifically his access to "full lists" of NSA's agents and operation in adversary countries could, if revealed, closed down the NSA's capabilities to gather information in them.

Such a fascination with the power of government-held secrets has always been a core concern of radical libertarians. In his 1956 book *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, the sociologist Edward Shils brilliantly dissects the fascination with secrecy among individuals on all ends of the political spectrum who fear that government agencies will use covert machinations against them. In Shils' concept, this anti-government counter-culture is "tormented" by the government's possession of knowledge unavailable to them. Those who subscribe to this culture tend to believe that the agencies that hold these secrets, such as the FBI, CIA and NSA, can control their lives. The other side of this torment over others holding secrets is the belief that by obtaining such secrets will give individuals power over government.

Snowden himself was concerned with a coming "dark future," which he later described as follows: "[The elites] know everything about us and we know nothing about them – because they are secret, they are privileged, and they are a separate class… the elite class, the political class, the resource class – we don't know where they live, we don't know what they do, we don't know who their friends are. They have the ability to know all that about us. This is the direction of the future but I think there are changing possibilities in this."

To change the "dark future," someone would have to know the secrets of the "elites." Snowden saw himself as one of the few individuals in a position to seize state secrets from those elites. He had both a SCI, or Sensitive Compartmental Information, clearance, a pass into a NSA regional base and the privileges of a system administrator. This position allowed him to steal state secrets—and whatever power that went with them. And if he moved to a position that gave him greater access, he would, in this view, amass even greater power.

Whatever his actual agenda in 2012, we know that he tested possible reactions to a leak exposing NSA surveillance in the United States. He asked fellow workers at the NSA base in 2012, according to his own account: "What do you think the public would do if this [secret data] was on the front page?" He asked this question at a time when a large number of State Department and US Army classified documents had been posted on Julian Assange's Wikileaks website. While these Wikileaks revelations of secrets were making front-page headlines, the NSA documents that Snowden had taken were far more explosive since they contained NSA intelligence secrets. And no NSA document had ever been published in the press in 2012. One reason why NSA documents remained secrets, as all intelligence workers at Dell were told when they signed their oath, was that the unauthorized release of communications intelligence documents could violate US espionage laws.

Even so, there was no shortage of activists overseas, such as Assange, who would be willing to publish NSA documents revealing its global surveillance activities. And in answer to his rhetorical question, he no doubt knew that they would cause an immense reaction on the front page. Cyber punks, as these activists called themselves, tended to be hostile to the NSA since they believed (correctly) that it monitored their activities on the Internet. This anti-NSA view was well represented at the Computer Chaos Club convention in Berlin. In addressing these cyber punks Assange and his followers at Wikileaks declared that the main enemy in cyber space was the NSA.

In the late fall of 2012, Snowden further tested his newly found powers. Using an alias, he reached out to some of the leading hacktavists. It opened a door for him to the darker side of cyber space.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hacktavist

. "When you gaze long into an abyss the abyss gazes into you". ~ Friedrich Nietzsche

By 2012, the alienated hacktavist battling to unlock the secrets of evil corporations and governments had become a stock hero of popular culture. For example, in the prize-winning *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy by Stieg Larsson, which sold 90 million copies, the heroine, a self-educated hacker in her twenties named Lisbeth Salander steals incriminating documents from computers that provides journalist Mikael Blomkvist with scoops that save the progressive magazine he edits from bankruptcy. Her sociopathic behavior, which includes embezzling millions of dollars, extortion, maiming and murder, is accepted by the journalists at the magazine because her hacking exposes crimes and abuses of power. In the realm of non-fiction universe, hacktavists also use their skills to attempt to redress perceived abuses of power, For example in December 2010, the group "Anonymous," whose members called "Anon" often wear Guy Fawkes masks resembling those worn in the 2006 movie *V Is For Vendetta*, launched a successful denial of service attack called "Operation Avenge Assange," It was aimed at paralyzing companies, including PayPal and MasterCard that refused to process donations for Wikileaks because these "anons" believed that these companies were stifling the freedom of the Internet by hindering the money flow to Wikileaks. Since hacktavists often use illicit means to redress their grievances, such denial of service attacks, theft of passwords and hacking into computers, they must conceal their true identities to avoid the retribution of the FBI and other law enforcement agencies. This requires them to operate on the dark side of cyber space which has become known as the dark net. Fortunately for hacktavists, the dark net is accessible to anyone.

It is a place frequented by those that want to avoid laws, regulations and government surveillance. Its denizens include cyber saboteurs, industrial spies, purveyors of illegal contraband, spammers, pranksters, identity thieves, video pirates, bullies, slanderers, drug dealers, child pornographers, money launderers, contract killers, inside traders, anarchists, terrorists, and the intelligence services of many countries.

Sue Halpern writing about it in the New York Review of books noted: "My own forays to the dark Net include visits to sites offering counterfeit drivers' licenses, methamphetamine, a template for a US twenty-dollar bill, files to make a 3D-printed gun, and books describing how to receive illegal goods in the mail without getting caught. There were, too, links to rape and child abuse videos "

To operate effectively on the dark net, a mask of anonymity is often necessary. But it is not easy to completely hide enes tracks in cyber space. The way that the Internet ordinarily works is that whenever an individual sends emails, instant messages, or visits a websites, his or her identity can be referenced by the IP address assigned to him or her by their internet service provider. The problem is that if dark side users' IP address is discoverable, they obviously cannot remain anonymous. So, to evade this built-in transparency in the Internet, dark side users have come to rely on ingenious software to hide their IP address. The most commonly used software for this purpose is TOR. It was first called The Onion Router, since it moves IP addresses through multiple layers, but it quickly became known simply by its acronym, TOR. TOR software hides the IP address by routing messages through a network of TOR-enabled relay stations, called "nodes." Each node further obscure the user's IP, even from the next node in the network. This scrambling allows messages to exit the chain of TOR nodes without an easily discoverable IP. By doing so, it "anomizes" each user of the dark side.

Because of the anonymity it provides, TOR became the software of choice for individuals and organization who wanted to hide their identity. For example, TOR software made possible Silk Road, which acted as an exchange for drug dealers, assassins, safe crackers, and prostitutes until it was closed down by the FBI in 2011. It was created by Ross Ulbricht, a libertarian who wore a Ron Paul t-shirt, "to create a website where people could buy anything anonymously, with no trail whatsoever that led back to them." (Ulbricht received a life prison sentence for running this criminal enterprise in May 2015.) To eradicate the Internet trail, Silk Road employed TOR software.

TOR was also employed to steal and transfer classified secrets by Private Bradley Manning (now called Chelsea Manning.) He used TOR software to transfer some 50,000 diplomatic cables and military reports from his laptop to Julian Assange's Wikileaks website. Eventually Manning was identified by a fellow hacker, convicted by a military court for violations of the Espionage Act, and sentenced to 35 years in prison. TOR enabled Wikileaks to publish other secret data, such as the theft of Sony's files allegedly by the North Korean intelligence service in 2015. It was the means for guaranteeing anonymity to the IT workers who responded to his by now famous clarion call "System admins of the world unite." It allowed system administrators who opposed the "surveillance state," as well as other disgruntled employees of government agencies or corporation, to send documents they copied to the Wikileaks website without revealing their IP addresses. Since Wikileaks did not know the identity of their sources, they could not be legally compelled to reveal them. "Tor's importance to WikiLeaks cannot be overstated," Assange said in an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 2010. Indeed without the anonymity provided by its TOR software, Wikileaks could not have easily entered into a document-sharing arrangement major newspapers, including the *Guardian, New York Times, Der Spiegel, Le Monde* and *El Pais.* Through the magic of TOR, these newspapers simply attribute their sources to Wikileaks which, in turn, made Assange a major force in international journalism/.

Ironically, TOR originally was a creation of US intelligence. In the early 2000s, the US Naval Research Laboratory and the Defense Advance Research Project Agency (DARPA) developed it to allow US intelligence operatives to cloak their movements on the Internet. They could anonymously manipulate web sites operated by Islamic radicals, for example, and create their own Trojan Horse sites to lures would-be terrorists and spies. As it turned out, that use of TOR software had a conceptual flaw. If US intelligence services used it, the targets could figure out that anyone visiting a site without an IP address was using TOR software to hide it. If TOR was exclusive used by US intelligence services, the targets could further deduce that all the anonymous visitors were avatars for American intelligence. It would be analogous to undercover police using pink-color cars that civilians did not use.

To remedy this flaw, the US government in 2008 made TOR software open-source and freely available to everyone in the world. It even provided funding for its promulgation with the State Department, the National Science Foundation, and the Broadcasting Board of Governors financing TOR's core developer. The public rationale for this generosity was that TOR could serve as a tool for, as the State Department called it, "democracy advocates in authoritarian states." The result was TOR software became a tool of both intelligence services and their adversaries.

As TOR software became widely used by adversaries (as well as common criminals), the NSA sought to find vulnerabilities in it. "It should hardly be surprising that our intelligence agencies seek ways to counteract targets' that use TOR software to hide their communications, explained a NSA spokesperson. The NSA's adversaries also took an interest in identifying TOR users.

TOR software also took on a cult-like importance to hacktavists concerned with the US government tracking their activities. An illuminating insight into the mind-set of the TOR hacktavists is provided by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick in her 2013 book *Privacy For Me Not For Thee*. She describes these hacktavists as largely "radical anarchists," who believe "the state is all-powerful, that law-enforcement is so strong that it will prevail anyway, and that they are a persecuted minority." As a refuge against the surveillance of the state, and in particular the NSA, they not only hide attempt to their own identity nut use encryption to obscure their messages. Their goal is free their movements from "of any interference from law-enforcement." In this mind-set, according to Fitzpatrick, "They believe government intelligence agencies will stop at nothing to stop them from absolute encryption."

TOR software was a means to defeat the NSA, but to be successfully there needed to be such a proliferation of TOR servers that the NSA could not piece together IP addresses. The problem was that in 2012 the TOR project, as they called it, was still a very tiny operation in 2012. It employed less than 100 core developers who were located mainly in Germany, Iceland, Japan, Estonia, and the United States. Its staff worked mainly out of a single room in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The guiding spirit behind the TOR movement was Jacob Appelbaum, a charismatic 28-year old who had grown up in northern California. Like Snowden, he had dropped out of high school. Appelbaum identified himself to his followers on the Internet as a "hacktivist" battling state surveillance. For him, as with many in the hacktavist culture, the main enemy was the NSA. After all, the NSA had a vast army of computer scientists working to unravel TOR software.

Appelbaum was also well connected in this culture. He was the North American representative for Wikileaks before he moved to Berlin in 2013. He also managed Wikileaks' cyber security when it released classified documents in Iceland in 2010. He was so well-regarded among hacktavists that Assange chose him as his keynote speaker replacement at the "Hackers of the Planet Earth" (HOPE) convention in New York City. Assange also sung his praises, telling *Rolling Ston*e "Jake [Appelbaum] has been a tireless promoter behind the scenes of our cause." For its part, *Rolling Stone* entitled its profile of Appelbaum, "Meet the most dangerous man on the Internet." The reason that Assange needed a replacement for this particular event was that he feared he would be arrested if he came to New York because he had released the Manning files on Wikileaks.

In Berlin, Appelbaum went to extreme lengths to protect himself from American surveillance. For example, when George Packer interviewed him for the *New Yorker*, in 2014, he insisted on meeting with Packer naked in a sauna so he could be sure Packer did not have a recording device (other than his notebook.) Appelbaum stated repeatedly in other interviews that he was being spied upon by America. While his claims may have sounded paranoid to his interviewers, as a character in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* famously said, "Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean that you are not being followed." In any event, Appelbaum acted to defeat the perceived surveillance.

Runa Sandvik was another principal core developers in the TOR project in 2012. A Norwegian national in her mid-twenties, she wrote in 2012 a well-followed blog for *Forbes* on Internet privacy in which she identified herself as a privacy and security researcher working at the intersection of technology, law and policy. As a close associate of Appelbaum's, she worked tirelessly to extend TOR's cloak of anonymity against the surveillance of the NSA and other would-be intruders of privacy. Appelbaum and Sandvik shared another distinction. They both came in contact with Snowden before he went public and while he was still working for the NSA in Hawaii.

Snowden was in 2012 a major advocate of TOR software. He made no secret of his concerns about it electronic interceptions. He even wore to work a jacket with a parody of the NSA insignia, which, instead of merely depicting the NSA eagle, show the eagle clutching AT&T phone lines. He had also become a member of the Electronic Freedom Foundation, the digital rights organization that was helping finance TOR**.** His efforts on behalf of TOR were not limited to symbolic gestures. **Through** his work as a system administrator for Dell, he had found documents revealing NSA efforts to defeat TOR's ability to camouflage its user's identity on the Internet. Though not yet successful, he found that the NSA was attempting to build back-door entry ways into TOR software. He also knew that the NSA was becoming increasingly hostile to the spread of TOR software. One of the NSA documents that he illicitly downloaded was entitled "TOR Stinks." It described the NSA's enormous but not fully successful efforts to penetrate TOR servers. In addition, he downloaded NSA documents describing programs begun in 2012 that aimed at searching the Internet for the cyber-signatures of foreign parties suspected of hacking into US government systems. So he knew that the NSA considered the TOR movement an enemy.

Nevertheless, Snowden worked to assist the TOR movement. He created TOR's main exit node in Hawaii in 2012. This activity required a two gigabyte server called "The Signal," which he described as the largest TOR relay station in Honolulu.

Sandvik first heard directly from Snowden in November 2012. At the time, he wrote her under the alias "Cincinnatus," but also supplied his real name and address in Hawaii so that she could supply him with TOR stickers. So she knew his identity seven months before he went public. He would later tell Sandvik from Moscow that he had been "moonlighting" on behalf of the TOR cause at the NSA. By "moonlighting" he meant that in 2012 he had two jobs: Officially he was working as an NSA system administrator; unofficially he was working to advance the TOR Project. He added, with some understatement, that his moonlighting was "something the NSA might not have been too happy about."

By November 2012, while still working for Dell at the NSA, his dual role led him to organize a "crypto party" aimed at finding new recruits for TOR. The "crypto party" movement itself had been started in 2011 in Australia by Asher Wolf, a radical hacktavist and anarchist living in Melbourne. She promoted them not unlike the tupper-ware parties of the 1950s. They worked as follows. The party organizer, usually with a representative of the TOR project, advertised the party on the Internet. Attendees were encouraged to bring their own laptops so they could install TOR as well encryption software in them. The attendees then would be instructed on how to use it. Finally, those converted to TOR software would be told to proselytize about its virtues by holding their own "crypto party." Wolf's idea was to use these gatherings to expand the realm of TOR.

On November 18, 2012, Snowden launched his initial crypto party. It was called the "Oahu Crypto party" and had its own web page. He told Asher Wolf that it would be the first Crypto party in Honolulu. She wrote him back, advising him to "keep it simple."(Wolf later said she did not know he was working at the NSA.)

Snowden apparently had no inhibitions in staging a party which the NSA might consider subversive of its battle against TOR. He even invited his fellow NSA workers in Hawaii as well as others in the local computer culture. He asked Sandvik, who was living in Washington DC at the time, to participate, proposing that she co-host it with him in Honolulu. He scheduled it for December 11, 2012. He suggested that TOR stickers that could be used as "swag" to lure an audience. According to her account, Snowden informed he that he "had been talking to some of the more technical guys at work into setting up some additional fast servers" for TOR. His "work" place at the time was the NSA. If so, he had already attempted to find co-workers at the NSA who might be interested in attending an anti-NSA surveillance presentation.

Sandvik not only agreed a to be Snowden's co-presenter but she made the Oahu Crypto party a TOR-sponsored event. Sandvik flew to Honolulu on December 6, 2012. It was a fourteen hour flight and a relatively expensive one. She later told *Wired* magazine that the invitation from Snowden coincided with her plan to take a "vacation in Hawaii." Whatever her reason, it brought her in direct contact with a TOR supporter with access to the computers of its main enemy, the NSA.

On December 11, 2012, following Snowden's instructions, Sandvik arrived shortly before 6 PM at the Fishcake furniture store in downtown Honolulu. She proceed to the back of the store where there was a public space called the Box Jelly. It was used mainly for counterculture events. Folding chairs and work tables had already been set up, Snowden was there waiting for her with Lindsay Mills, who he introduced to Sandvik as his girlfriend. He told her that she was there to film the event.

Mills did not mention this Crypto party in her blog. But that Snowden brought her and introduced her to Sandvik suggests that he did not keep secret from her his activities to further TOR.

The event started at six PM sharp. By Sandvik's count, about twenty people gradually filled the room. Some of them were from the local "Hi-Cap" computer club and other attendees were from Snowden's NSA base. Snowden began the presentation by giving reasons why Internet users needed to defend their privacy by using both encryption and TOR software. According to one attendee who asked not to be identified by name, Snowden, while not revealing that he worked for the NSA, spoke with such precise knowledge about government surveillance capabilities that he suspected Snowden worked for the government. Snowden next introduced Sandvik, who took the podium and discussed the work of the TOR project, stressing the importance of expanding the TOR network. Following their presentations, Snowden and Sandvik took questions from the audience.

The Oahu crypto party, according to Sandvik, ended about 10 PM. No one objected to Mills making a video of the meeting even though it was dedicated to the idea of protecting privacy. The video was not posted on the Internet so presumably Snowden wanted it for his own purposes. Afterwards, Sandvik went to a local diner called Zippy's for a late dinner. She left Hawaii two days later.

Even though a number of the prominent hacktavists he invited were unable to attend, Snowden declared the Crypto party a huge success in his after-hours report. One of the people Snowden invited under the alias Cincinnatus was Parker Higgins, who was a prime mover in the previously-mentioned Electronic Freedom Foundation. He now lived in California where he had founded the San Francisco Crypto Party. (Higgins would make headlines in 2013 by flying a chartered blimp over the NSA's secret facility in Utah and photographing it from the air). Despite Snowden's efforts, Higgins wrote him that he was unable to attend the December Crypto Party because of the high price of the airfare that month between San Francisco and Honolulu. (Higgins was hardly poor: his family home in Oahu had been rented to President Obama for two of his vacations in Hawaii.) As a consolation, Higgins told Snowden that he would try to attend Snowden's next Crypto Party, which was scheduled for February 23, 2013.

Even while he used his position as a system administrator at Dell for the NSA to download secret documents, Snowden remained in touch with some of the leading figures in the TOR project under his various aliases. He also continued to invite activists to his crypto parties and he openly advertised the Oahu Crypto Parties on the Internet until 2013. It certainly was not the "loose lips sink ships" mind set of the NSA's Cold War days. It better reflected on what CIA Deputy Director Morell, who reviewed the situation in 2014 as a member of President Obama's NSA Review Committee, described as the NSA's new "culture of transparency." Even though the NSA's activities were largely walled off to the outside world, he found that the NSA in the post-Cold War age had encouraged its technical workers to freely discuss challenges that arose in its computer operations. 'The idea was to spread knowledge and learn from the successes of others," Morell wrote, "but it created an enormous security vulnerability, given the always-existent risk of an insider committed to stealing secrets." According to a former intelligence executive, this new "open culture," exemplified by largely unrestricted entry to the NSANet by civilian contractors," fit the culture of the young civilians on the "geek squads" who now ran the NSA's computer networks.

It was remarkable that even in such "open culture "Snowden's crypto party, TOR station, and other anti-NSA activities could go unnoticed. After all, ten or so NSA workers attended the first party it is not unlikely that many of them recognized him as their co-worker. If so, they knew (as did Sandvik and Mills) that the TOR advocate "Cincinnatus" was Snowden. He had also not been shy in contacting via email notable enemies of the NSA, such as Jacob Appelbaum, Parker Higgins and Asher Wolf on behalf of the "Oahu Crypto Party." If anyone, including the security staff of the NSA, had been on the lookout for dissident intelligence workers, this well-advertised gathering, and its organizer, might have been of interest. In 2014, I asked a former top NSA executive whether such activities on behalf of TOR by a NSA employee would arouse the attention of the NSA's own "Q" counterespionage unit. He answered, "Snowden was not a NSA employee." As a contract employee of Dell residing in the United States, the NSA could not legally monitor his private activities or intercept his communication. To do so, would require a FBI request approved by the FISA court. So Snowden/Cincinnatus was free to operate openly in recruiting NSA workers, hacktavists and computer buffs for his events. Ironically, adversary intelligence services searching for disgruntled intelligence workers had no such constraints.

CHAPTER NINE

The String-Puller

"It wasn't that they put it on me as an individual — that I'm uniquely qualified [or] an angel descending from the heavens — as that they put it on someone, somewhere."

--Edward Snowden in Moscow, 2013

Downloading NSA documents was not Snowden's only rogue activity while working at the NSA for Dell in 2012. Three weeks after the Crypto party, Snowden began anonymously contacting a high-profile journalist, He used the same alias "Cincinnatus" that he used with Sandvik, and to advertise the Oahu Crypto Party. The journalist to whom he wrote On December 1, 2012, was Glenn Greenwald, the previously-mentioned Rio-based columnist for the *Guardian.*

Greenwald had not always been an activist journalist. Up until 2004, Greenwald was a litigation lawyer at the elite New York firm of Wachtell, Lipton, and Rosen & Katz. He was also an entrepreneur owning part of Master Notions, a company which, among other things, had a fifty percent financial interest in the pornographic website HJ (an acronym which originally stood for "Hairy Jock.") All did not go well with this enterprise. In 2004, Greenwald became involved in an acrimonious law suit with his other associates in HJ. As a result, he had a number of open legal judgments filed against him, including an $85,000 lien by the IRS.

After resigning from his law firm in 2005, he moved to Rio de Janeiro and began a new career as a blogger for the Internet magazine *Salon*. He wrote fierce, and often brilliant, polemics against US government surveillance and other perceived intrusions on personal privacy The extent of his bitter antagonism to the activities of the "surveillance state," as he called it, was reflected in the title of his 2007 book, *How Would a Patriot Act? Defending American Values from a President Run Amok.* His position on surveillance was unrelenting, even when it came to the president. "By ordering illegal eavesdropping, the president had committed crimes and should be held accountable for them," Greenwald wrote. When Barack Obama became President in 2009, Greenwald also attacked him for breaking the law by "ordering illegal eavesdropping." Because of his opposition to President Obama, he contributed money to the libertarian campaign of Ron Paul, the same candidate to whom Snowden gave money.

In August 2012, he had transferred his provocative blog, which had amassed a following of nearly one million readers (including Snowden), from *Salon* to the *Guardian*. The British newspaper also had a powerful anti-surveillance position, having first published the Wikileaks documents that had been illicitly leaked by Private Bradley Manning and published by Assange in 2010.

Greenwald was an activist as well as a journalist. Like Poitras, he joined the board of directors of the Freedom of the Press Foundation. The foundation, which eventually Runa Sandvik and Micah Lee would join, had been set up expressly to funnel money to both Assange's Wikileaks site and the defense fund for Bradley Manning after he was arrested. Such a money laundry was necessary because, as will be recalled, American credit card companies were blocking money transfers to these two causes. This "blockade" was taking its toll on Wikileaks. According to Assange, "WikiLeaks had been cut off from more than 90 percent of its finances." So the Freedom of the Press Foundation came to its rescue. John Perry Barlow, one of the song writers for the Grateful Dead band, was one of its chief financial backers. "The first serious info war is now engaged, Barlow declared. "The field of battle is WikiLeaks." He served with Greenwald and Poitras on its Board in December 2012.

Snowden was an avid reader of Greenwald's screeds against the government. If he was to assume the role of a modern-day Prometheus, delivering forbidden secrets of the NSA to the public, Greenwald would be a logical candidate to break the story. Snowden could safely assume that Greenwald would be sympathetic to exposing NSA surveillance from his many blogs, tweets and YouTube comments on the subject. For example, on November 13 2012, just 18 days before Snowden contacted him, Greenwald had written a blog in *Guardian* asserting that the United States was "a surveillance state run amok." In it, echoing very closely what Snowden said at his Crypto party, Greenwald wrote that "any remnants of internet anonymity have been all but obliterated by the union between the state and technology companies." Citing a story in the *Washington Pos*t, he continued: "Every day, collection systems at the National Security Agency intercept and store 1.7 billion e-mails, phone calls and other types of communications." As a result, Greenwald called for action in his blog on November 13, 2012, writing: "The US operates a sprawling, unaccountable Surveillance State that, in violent breach of the core guarantees of the Fourth Amendment, monitors and records virtually everything even the most law-abiding citizens do." That same week Snowden invited Runa Sandvik to co-host his crypto party.

One problem for Snowden was reaching out to Greenwald was Greenwald's lack of any encryption for his e-mails. Communicating with a journalist like Greenwald who famously attacked the very organization for which he worked was itself a risky undertaking, especially if he wanted to pass classified NSA documents to him. If his emails were intercepted by the NSA in Brazil (where Greenwald lived) and where the NSA was not restricted by US law, he could lose his job or even be arrested. Under his alias Cincinnatus, he told Greenwald that he needed to immediately encrypt his computer. To make his point, he cited Greenwald's own November 12, 2012 blog. In it, Greenwald noted that General David Petraeus, then the CIA director, had been caught in a minor sex scandal because his personal emails had been intercepted, Snowden wrote Greenwald that Petraeus would not have been exposed if he had used encryption. Snowden also sent Greenwald instruction on how to install the necessary encryption software and a link to a 12-

minute video on encryption (which might have been the same video he used at his Crypto party a few weeks earlier.)

Greenwald did not manage to encrypt his computer, however. Snowden, unwilling to deal with Greenwald through an unencrypted channel, broke off contact with him in January 2013. Even so, he did not give up his plan of using Greenwald in his enterprise. He sought an intermediary who used encryption.

The alternative route to Greenwald that Snowden chose was Laura Poitras. He knew she had am association with him. They both were founding board members of the Freedom of the Press Foundation. Greenwald had also written about her extensively. For example, he wrote an entire blog about her confrontation with the US government and her plans to make a documentary about the "U.S. Government's increasing powers of domestic surveillance [through] its expanding covert domestic NSA activities"

Since 2011, Poitras had been filming the construction of a massive NSA repository for data in Bluffdale, Utah. In the anti-surveillance culture, the structure had become symbolic of the powers of the NSA. In fact, was the same NSA site that Parker Higgins photographed from a blimp in the fall of 2013 and post on the Internet. Just six months earlier in August 2012, Poitras had released her documentary about the NSA's use of the Bluffdale repository for domestic spying,

Aside from her connections with Greenwald, Poitras had other impressive credentials. Born in 1964 in Boston, She came from a wealthy family that donated large sums of money to philanthropic causes, including $20 million for research on bipolar disorders. After graduating from the New School for Public Engagement in 1996, she pursued a career as an activist film-maker. Her focus quickly became exposing NSA's surveillance. One of her short documentaries about the NSA's domestic surveillance program was featured on the *New York Times* website and attracted enormous attention in 2012. As a dedicated opponent of the surveillance state, she participated in public events with William Binney, the now famous ex-NSA whistle-blower, and Jacob Appelbaum. In April 2012, for example, she made a presentation at the Whitney Museum in New York with Binney and Appelbaum. She became such a leading activist against the NSA by December 2012 that Appelbaum, after lauding her work, interspersed clips from her short film in his keynote address at the Computer Chaos Club convention of hacktavists in Berlin in December 2012. Snowden also closely followed her rise in this world. By simply googling Poitras' name in January 2013, he would have learned about her connections with Greenwald, Appelbaum, Binney, Assange and other leading figures in the anti-surveillance camp. When asked later Snowden why he had chosen her to help him, He replied "I didn't. You chose yourself." The problem for Snowden was anonymously drawing her in to his enterprise.

Poitras was living in Berlin in January 2013, which made her vulnerable to NSA surveillance. To get to her through an encrypted channel, Snowden chose a circuitous approach. On January 11, 2013, he wrote to Micah Lee in Berkeley, California. Unlike Greenwald and Poitras, Lee resided in America. This U.S. residence meant, as Snowden knew, the NSA would be legally barred from monitoring his communications. He used Lee, who was the chief technology officer at the Freedom of the Press Foundation, as the encrypted gateway to Poitras who, it will be recalled was a founding Board member of that small foundation. Lee also was well-connected to others with whom Snowden had contacted for his crypto party. Lee had been an associate of Runa Sandvik's at TOR and was a prominent member of Noisebridge, an eclectic anti-government hackers' commune based in Northern California, of which Appelbaum was also a member.

To contact Lee, Snowden chose the alias Anon108. Anon was an alias frequently used by members of the Anonymous commune of hacktavists. "I'm a friend." Snowden wrote Lee. "I need to get information securely to Laura Poitras and her alone, but I can't find an email/gpg key for her." The "gpg" encryption key he asked for, more commonly called a PGP key, was the so-called public key for an encryption system called Pretty Good Privacy, or, for short, PGP. This encryption system required both a public and private key. Snowden asked Lee to provide the former one, since Poitras had the latter one. Lee wrote Poitras about "anon108." The next day, with the approval of Poitras, Lee supplied Poitras' public key to Snowden, or, as he knew him, Anon108.

With it, Snowden now contacted Poitras directly. He asked her as a first step to open an anonymous email account using TOR software. He was now in contact with three members of the Freedom of the Press Foundation—Greenwald, Lee, and Poitras. (Sandvik would join the foundation in 2013.)

Poitras later wrote about this initial contact: "I was at that point filming with several people who were all being targeted by the [US] government." The people she was filming included Appelbaum, Assange, and two former NSA employees, William Binney and Thomas Drake. It was in the midst of this project when she received the email from Anon108 aka Edward Snowden.

He next asked Poitras her take out a new enciphering key to use exclusively for her liaison with him. It provided them both with an extra layer of protection from any surveillance by law enforcement. Presumably, she accommodated his requests because she anticipated that the anonymous person would use this encrypted channel to send her highly-sensitive material.

On January 23, 2013 Snowden wrote Poitras under yet another alias. This time he called himself "Citizen Four." He wrote: "At this stage I can offer nothing more than my word." He then said falsely, "I am a senior government employee in the intelligence community." She had no way of knowing at this "stage" that, despite giving her his "word," he was not who he claimed to be. He was not a "government employee, " he was not a "senior" official and he was a member of the "intelligence community" (which is composed of the intelligence services of the U.S. government .) He would later also claim to her that he had been "a senior adviser to the CIA" and "a senior adviser to the DIA." In fact, he had never held such position at either intelligence service. In January 2013, he was merely a contract employee of Dell working as a computer technician at the NSA base in Hawaii.

Snowden told her in his initial email that he was well-acquainted with her career as an anti-surveillance activist. He said that he had read Greenwald's account in *Salon* that past April, a blog in which Greenwald detailed the 40 times in which Poitras was searched by US authorities. The story also said that Poitras believed that she was on a special watch-list and under constant US government surveillance. She had come under such scrutiny by US authorities, it turned out, because of her documentary about American military abuses of civilians in Iraq in 2005 entitled "The Oath". While filming it she was at a place close to an insurgent ambush of US troops in Iraq. Her presence at the ambush site led Army intelligence officers to suspect (without any evidence) that she might have been tipped off by the insurgents. She firmly denied the charge and the government never substantiated it. Even so, because of this incident, she was kept on a list that caused authorities to search her at airports. As a result, she took elaborate counter-measures to evade any possible surveillance of her communications.

Snowden knew about this incident because Greenwald described them in a great detail in a blog that Snowden read (as he later told Greenwald.) "Poitras is now forced to take extreme steps — ones that hamper her ability to do her work, "Greenwald wrote: "She now avoids traveling with any electronic devices. She uses alternative methods to deliver the most sensitive parts of her work — raw film and interview notes — to secure locations. She spends substantial time and resources protecting her computers with encryption and password defenses. Especially when she is in the U.S., she avoids talking on the phone about her work, particularly to sources. And she simply will not edit her films at her home out of fear — obviously well-grounded — that government agents will attempt to search and seize the raw footage." She claimed, as she told journalists, she was the victim of "Kafkaesque government harassment."

Snowden was duly impressed with her concerns about government surveillance. She fully subscribed to his view that that government surveillance was ubiquitous. Indeed, he later described her as "more paranoid when it comes to electronic security than I can be." He meant it as a compliment. Such functional paranoia or, "operational security," as Greenwald would call the precautions that she took, dove-tailed with Snowden's growing conviction that universal encryption was necessary to defeat the surveillance state. It also made her the perfect channel for Snowden to safely pass some of the classified documents he stole to Greenwald and other journalists.

It was not difficult to get her to cooperate in his plot. He played on her well-known concern about government surveillance. He wrote, for example, "The surveillance you've experienced means you have been 'selected'—a term which will mean more to you as you learn how the modern SIGINT system works." Just as she had been "chosen" by her work to act as his conduit, according to Snowden, she had been chosen by the NSA as a target because of her work. The idea of her being "selected" by an invisible signal intelligence agency, the NSA, could only excite her long-time concerns about being watched by the government. “Your victimization by the NSA system means that you are well aware of the threat that [the NSA’s] unrestricted, secret abilities pose for democracies,” he continued. “I hope you understand that contacting you is extremely high risk and if you are willing to agree to the following precautions before I share more, this will not be a waste of your time.” Further heightening her concern that she was under surveillance, he asked her to confirm to him “that no one has ever had a copy of your private key and that it uses a strong passphrase.” Such precautions were necessary because “your adversary is capable of one trillion guesses per second.” That “adversary” was, as she knew from her previous film, the NSA. At this point, she knew she was entering into a dangerous liaison with an unknown party in pursuit of NSA secrets.

To elude this “adversary,” Snowden stressed to her that she would have to adopt a conspiratorial set of mind. “If the device you store the private key and enter your passphrase on has been hacked, it is trivial to decrypt our communications,” he explained. “If you publish the source material, I will likely be immediately implicated.” If her correspondent could be “immediately implicated,” it meant that he was a person authorized to handle these secrets. So Poitras knew, as early as January 2013 that she was creating an encrypted channel for someone with access to NSA secrets and who would be incriminated by providing them to her.

The key source for Poitras’ previously-referred to short video was William Binney. Like her new source, he had been authorized to handle NSA secrets. Binney had been a NSA technical director until he had retired in 2001. The NSA’s domestic surveillance program that Binney told the press about years before being interviewed in Poitras’ film was called “Stellar Wind.” It indeed led to a major expose of domestic spying by the *New York Times* in December 2005. After President Bush’s own Justice Department then held that such surveillance was illegal, Congress passed a revision of the Patriot Act in 2007 that effectively legalize the “Stellar Wind” surveillance program on condition that the NSA obtain a FISA warrant for it that would be periodically reviewed by the Department of Justice.

Binney had never provided Poitras with any NSA documents to back up the charges he made about Stellar Wind. He could not have done so without violating his sworn oath and, for that matter, US anti-espionage statutes. Binney made it clear to her and other journalists that he was not a law breaker. But her new source, Snowden, was willing to do what Binney (and other insiders) had refused to do. He was offering in these emails to provide her with secret government documents even though it would implicate him as an outlaw. To further whet her appetite, he told her that these up-to-date NSA documents would fully substantiate the allegations that Binney made in her film. Even more important, he said Binney’s 2001 disclosures were still relevant to her cause. “What you know as Stellar Wind has grown” he wrote her. In fact, as Snowden knew from the draft Inspector-General report he stole in 2012 that Stellar Wind been terminated in 2011 by the NSA for budgetary reasons. He continued: “The expanded special source operations that took over Stellar Wind’s share of the pie have spread all over the world to practically include comprehensive coverage of the United States." As a result, he wrote. "The amount of US communications ingested by the NSA is still increasing."

He further offered to substantiate her worst fears about the growth of NSA surveillance' "I know the location of most domestic interception points, and that the largest telecommunication companies in the US are betraying the trust of their customers, which I can prove." He even proffered, evidence implicating President Barak Obama in illegal surveillance. "There is a detailed policy framework, a kind of martial law for cyber operations, created by the White House. It's called presidential policy 20," he wrote her. It was an 18-page directive that Obama had signed four months earlier in October 2012. Snowden was offering to reveal to her the up-to-date evidence of a surveillance state in America presided over by the President himself. It was what she had been searching for three years. How could she, as an activist film-maker, resist such a sensational offer?

He further explained to her that he had placed great trust in his discretion. "No one, not even my most trusted confidante, is aware of my intentions, and it would not be fair for them to fall under suspicion for my actions," he said.

Poitras must have found it flattering that a total stranger was willing to disclose to her in emails what he would not tell even his "most trusted confidante" about his intentions to commit an illicit breach of U.S. national security. It was an extraordinary risk he was taking. After all, "Citizen 4" had no way of knowing who she else she told about him. She had long been concerned, with good reason that the U.S. government was out to get her. An unknown person offering to supply her with secret documents could be attempting to entrap her. So he could not preclude she would not consult with others about the offer he was making her. Since her current documentary project included interviews with Assange, Appelbaum and three ex-NSA executives, intelligence services with sophisticated surveillance capabilities might also have taken a professional interest in her communications, as Poitras herself had suspected. Even if Snowden was somehow able to use his position as a system administrator at Dell to ascertain that the NSA did not have Poitras under surveillance, he could not be sure that other agencies, such as the Russian and Chinese intelligence services, were not be monitoring his communications with Poitras. It was, however, a chance Snowden evidently was willing to take.

Snowden, in any case, did not intend to conceal his identity for more than a few months. He told Poitras he had a specific purpose in allowing her to name him in her film. Indeed, he said it was essential in his plan to prevent others, including presumably his "most trusted confidante," from being suspected by law enforcement of helping him in his enterprise. He prevailed on her to accommodate his plan, saying: "You may be the only one who can prevent that, and that is by immediately nailing me to the cross rather than trying to protect me as a source." His choice of the imagery of crucifixion suggested that, like Jesus Christ, he was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others.

In keeping with their operational security regime, he said that he would first send her an encrypted file of documents that she would not be able to read. Only after his conditions were met and “everything else is done,” he said “The key will follow.” He was now pulling the strings. To get that key, she had to follow his instructions.

One of his conditions was that she helps him recruit Greenwald and other outlets for his disclosures. “The material provided and the investigative effort required will be too much for any one person,” he wrote Poitras. He next directed her to contact Greenwald. “I recommend that at the very minimum you involve Greenwald. I believe you know him.” (Snowden apparently did not tell her that he had unsuccessfully attempted to reach out to Greenwald before he had contacted her.)

His continued interest in Greenwald was understandable. Aside from Greenwald’s opposition to what he called the “Surveillance State,” he was a gateway to the *Guardian.* The *Guardian* had become an important player in the business of disclosing government by publishing a large part of the US documents supplied to Wikileaks. By breaking whistle-blowing stories about US intelligence, it had also greatly increased the circulation of its website. As an establishment newspaper, it also gave these Wikileaks stories credibility with the media. So despite Greenwald’s inability to create an encrypted channel, Snowden still needed him. He had no reason to believe that Greenwald would turn down the opportunity for a whistle-blowing scoop for the *Guardian*. After all, the classified documents Snowden would provide him would also give credence to both Greenwald’s book and his many blogs denouncing of US government surveillance.

Aside from Greenwald and Poitras, Snowden sought an outlet inside the American establishment. So he had Poitras write Barton Gellman, the Pulitzer Prize winning reporter for the *Washington Post*. Born in 1960, Gellman graduated from Princeton in 1981, and became an award-winning investigative reporter from the *Miami Herald, Washington Post* and *Time* magazine. He was also the author of the 2008 book *Angler: the Cheney Vice-Presidency*, which been made into an HBO mini-series. If Gellman could be drawn into the enterprise, he could provide Snowden with a gateway to the *Washington Post,* the prestigious American paper credited with bringing down President Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal.

Poitras, as the go-between for Snowden, immediately contacted Gellman. She already knew him from meetings they both attended at NYU’s Center on Law and Security. After telling him she was involved in a story about NSA surveillance, she suggested that they meet in New York City.

For their rendezvous, Poitras took a number of precautions to evade anyone attempting to follow her. She had Gellman first meet her in one coffee shop in lower Manhattan. When he arrived, she had him follow her on foot to another coffee shop following her anti-surveillance tradecraft. Once assured no one was watching them, she ordered coffee for herself and Gellman. Over coffee, she told Gellman about Snowden, who she described as her anonymous source. She said that he was willing to supply Gellman with documents that would expose domestic surveillance, if Gellman agreed to write a story on it for the *Washington Post*. Even though Gellman had left the staff of the *Washington Post* in 2010, he had previously written several stories on that subject for the newspaper. He was also highly-regarded by the editors there. He was therefore interested in Poitras' offer (although he would consult a friend at the Justice Department about the legality of publishing NSA documents.

Snowden now had laid the groundwork for at least two possible outlets; one an establishment newspaper in Washington DC, the *Washington Post; and* a well-respected international newspaper, the *Guardian*.

Poitras, however, was having some difficulty in bringing Greenwald in on the plan. Like Snowden, she did not trust writing him in unencrypted emails and, since Greenwald lived in Brazil, she still had not found an opportunity for a face-to-face meeting with him.

That opportunity arose in mid-April 2013. Greenwald had flown to New York to give the lead speech at an event in Yonkers, N.Y. sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, or CAIR, a pro-Moslem civil rights and anti-Zionist organization. He had delivered the keynote speech at its previous meeting in San Jose, California on November 22, 2012, where his impassioned depiction of the American "Surveillance State" in America received a rousing ovation from the attendees. He was invited to speak at this award dinner for its east coast chapter.

Poitras flew from Berlin to New York to see him. On April 19, 2013, she arranged to meet Greenwald at noon in the restaurant of the Marriott hotel where Greenwald was staying. When Greenwald arrived at the restaurant carrying a cell phone, she explained to him that the NSA could surreptitiously turn his cell phone into a microphone and use it to eavesdrop on their conversation. She told him to go back to his room to get rid of the phone. When he returned, phoneless, she took further precautions by having them change tables several times. Greenwald accepted these tactics because, as Greenwald later said, she was in charge of their "operational security."

After they finally found a secure table in the nearly empty restaurant, she showed Greenwald emails she had received from Snowden under the alias Citizen 4. Greenwald, as he recounted, made "no connection to the "long-forgotten emails" he had received from Snowden under the alias Cincinnatus. Reading the emails to Poitras, he was impressed with the "sincerity" of the anonymous correspondent.

When Poitras showed Greenwald Citizen 4's mission statement in which he said his motive was to end the US "surveillance state." Greenwald was further impressed with the source. After all, the surveillance state Snowden described closely dovetailed with the surveillance state that Greenwald had described himself in his speech at the Council on American-Islamic Relations dinner in 2012. Of course, the close proximity of the phrasing may not have been entirely coincidental. Greenwald's 2012 speech had been put on YouTube and widely circulated on the Internet just a few days before Snowden first wrote Greenwald on December 1, 2012. Snowden the emails identified himself as a privacy advocate, which was also how Greenwald often identified himself in his speeches. He also echoed other concerns Greenwald had publicly expressed including defending American privacy from government intrusions.

Snowden promised the leaks he would supply would provide dramatic results. He asserted in his email that the “shock” of the documents he would give Greenwald would result in the public’s learning about the secret “mechanisms through which our privacy is violated.” According to Snowden’s assessment, following that initial uproar, they could achieve another objective in their common cause. “We can guarantee for all people equal protection against unreasonable search,” he wrote. In light of this convergence of views, it is not surprising that Greenwald was fully convinced of Citizen 4’s *bona fides*. He said to Poitras, “He’s real,” and he agreed to help break the story in the *Guardian*.

After he said he was onboard the project, Poitras revealed to Greenwald that Citizen 4 would deliver an entire trove of secret documents to them in six to eight weeks. According to this timetable, the Greenwald’s scoop, and the “shock” Citizen 4 promised, would come in early to mid June 2013.

At this point in late April, Snowden was in full control. Although his day job at Dell involved endlessly monitoring largely-meaningless encrypted numbers in the NSA tunnel, he had been able to get three major journalists to react favorably to his proposal. None of them knew his name, position, age, location or where he precisely where he worked. Nor did they know the means by which he planned to obtain the secrets that he dangled before them. They also did not know where, or even if, they would meet their source. Their total knowledge about him was the description he gave of himself: a “senior government employee in the intelligence community” (which, as they only later would find out, was untrue.) For his part, Greenwald speculated that he was a disgruntled CIA station chief. Yet by his anonymous emails, and by tugging at their strings, he had lined up three journalists to break his story.

Despite the fact they were operating largely in the dark, these three journalists acted like almost any other ambitious reporter would act if they were offered a major scoop about illegal acts of the government. In addition, the information was in line with what they had previously investigated or written about. None of these journalists had any reason to doubt at this point that their anonymous source was anything but the sincere whistle-blower that he claimed to be. They could not have known from his anonymous emails that, aside from the whistle-blowing documents he promised them, he was in the process of stealing a large number of documents from the NSA’s National Threat Operations Center that concerned the NSA’s sources and methods in foreign countries. These documents, to which Snowden never referred in his correspondence with them, had little, if anything at all, to do with domestic spying on American citizens.

CHAPTER TEN

Raider of the Inner Sanctum

"They think there's a smoking gun in there that would be the death of them all politically."

—Edward Snowden in Moscow

The nightmare of the NSA is a penetration. As the CIA, FBI and NSA found out in the 1990s, No intelligence service is invulnerable to it. Any employee of a large intelligence organization can turn, or be turned, against it. Among the more than 10,000 intelligence workers employed by the NSA, it is a near certainty that over time one or more of them will become dissatisfied with their work. He or she may have a personal grievance about their pay, lack of promotion or their treatment by their superiors. Disenchantment with the NSA may also proceed from idealistic objections. After all, the NSA is in the business of secretly intercepting messages, and an insider could find its spying activities at odds with his or her own beliefs about the violation of privacy. For any of these reasons, a disgruntled insider could go rogue. He or she then might attempt to right a perceived wrong by disclosing the NSA secrets to another party. That party might then induce or blackmail the rogue employee into disclosing further secrets. To guard against it, the NSA has developed a well-organized system for stratifying its data so that obtaining critical secrets would require a rogue employee to burrow into its heavily protected inner sanctum. As part of this system, the NSA divides its data into different tiers depending on the importance of the secrets to its operations. The first tier, Level 1, is mainly administrative material. This data would include FISA court orders and other directives it employees might need to check on to carry out their tasks. Level 2 contains data from which the secret sources have been removed. This tier, available to other intelligence services and policy-makers, includes reports and analysis that can be shared. The third tier, Levels 3, contains documents that cannot be shared outside of a small group of authorized individuals because they disclose the secret sources through which the NSA surreptitiously obtained the information. This third tier includes, for example, compiled list of the sources in China, Russia, Iran and other adversary countries. It also disclosed the exotic methods the NSA uses to get some of this data. Level 3 documents also include reports on specific NSA, CIA and Pentagon operations unknown to adversaries. These Level 3 documents are described by NSA executives as “the Keys to the Kingdom” because they could invalidate America’s entire intelligence enterprise if they fell into the hands of an adversary. And, as far as is known, prior to 2013, there had been no successful theft of any Level 3 documents.

Because of their extreme sensitivity, Level 3 documents were not handled by most of the private firms providing independent contractors. At Dell, Snowden had access mainly to Level 1 and Level 2 data (which he could, and did, download from shared sites on the NSA Net.) These lower level documents had whistle-blowing potential since they concerned NSA operations in the US. They did not reveal, however, sources that the NSA used in intercepting the military and civilian activities of foreign adversaries. Consequently, at Dell, while Snowden could find documents of great interest to journalists, he did not have the opportunity to steal far more valuable data, such as the Level 3 lists of the NSA’s sources abroad.

Snowden quit his job at Dell as a system administrator on March 15, 2013 to take another job working the NSA in Hawaii at Booz Allen Hamilton. Unlike other outside contractors that serviced the NSA, the firm he choose, Booz Allen specialized in handling the NSA’s Level 3 data.

When Snowden applied to Booz Allen earlier in March 2013, the company had no opening for a system administrator at the National Threat Operations Center, an NSA unit in which it dealt with Level 3 data. It did have an opening for an infrastructure analyst, a lower-paying job involving maintaining the computer technology necessary to monitor threats. Despite the cut in pay, Snowden took that job. Snowden made no secret of one of his reason for this move. He subsequently told the *South China Morning Post,* as will be recalled, that he took it to “get access to lists of machines all over the world the NSA had hacked.” If so, he was after the keys to the NSA’s kingdom of global surveillance. And Booz Allen held those keys. "He targeted my company because we enjoy more access than other companies," Booz Allen Vice Chairman Michael McConnell said with the benefit of hindsight. As a result of the theft, he appraised “an entire generation of intelligence was lost.” McConnell, a former NSA director before taking the job at Booz Allen, was in a position to know.

Snowden’s sudden career change had both advantages and disadvantages for the enterprise he was planning. The main advantage was that the job, he would have proximity to the computers in which the “lists” he sought of NSA global sources were kept. The main disadvantage, aside from a cut in salary, was that he would no longer be a system administrator. This change meant he would not have a system administrator’s privileges to bypass password restrictions or temporarily transfer data. Instead, as an infrastructure analyst, he would not have password access, at least during the two-month long training period, to the computers that he had not been specifically “read into,” which did not include those computers that stored the Level 3 lists. Access to these tightly-controlled compartments was limited to only a handful of analysts at the center who had a need-to-know.

Nevertheless Snowden applied for the job. Since it handled higher level secret documents, Booz Allen had stricter requirements for applicants than Dell. To slip by them, Snowden engaged in a minor subterfuge. He wrote on his application that he was expecting a master's degree from the online division of Liverpool University in England. In fact, he had not completed a single course at Liverpool, and would not be receiving any sort of a degree from it. Booz Allen, not fully taking into account the discrepancy in his application, agreed to hire him as a trainee-analyst (and it did not change that decision even after it found out about his subterfuge.). According to Admiral McConnell, Snowden never actually worked in the Booz Allen offices, which are housed in a skyscraper in downtown Honolulu. Instead, he was immediately assigned to work at the NSA's highly-sensitive National Operations Threat Center in the tunnel at the Kunia base.

Before he could begin working there, however, he needed to fly to Maryland to take a mandatory orientation course at the NSA. The course was given in an 11 story building, with a sheer wall of black glass, on the NSA's 350 acre campus at Fort Meade in Maryland. He arrived there from Hawaii on April 1, 2013. Like every other Booz Allen contractors who work at the NSA's Center, Snowden was required to sign the "Sensitive Compartmented Information Non-Disclosure Agreement." In this document, Snowden acknowledged that he had been granted access to sensitive compartmented information, called SCI, as part of his work and that he understood that any disclosure of that information to an unauthorized person would violate federal criminal law. He was also told, as were all new contract employees a Booz Allen that its disclosure could damage the interest of the United States and benefit its enemies. In signing it, he swore an oath not to divulge any of this information without first receiving written approval from US authorities. So less than two months before he downloaded Sensitive Compartmented Information, he was fully aware of what would be the consequences of divulging this information. By this time, as discussed in the previous chapter, he had agreed to deliver classified data to three journalists.

On April 5, 2013, while still in the training facility in Maryland, he apparently sought to establish a paper trail for himself. He wrote a letter to NSA's General Counsel Office asking whether or not NSA directives take precedence over acts of Congress. A lawyer from the Office of General Counsel responded three days later, addressing Snowden as "Dear Ed." The lawyer said, agreeing with Snowden, that acts of Congress take precedence over NSA directives. He also suggested that "Ed" phone him if he needed any further clarification. Presumably, Snowden had written the letter to elicit a response that he could later use to bolster his claim to be a whistle-blower. Instead, the "Dear Ed" response was of little use to Snowden, as it did not dispute his point that NSA directives must lawfully conform to the acts of Congress. The NSA lawyer did not ever hear back from "Ed."

Snowden completed his orientation course at Fort Meade on Friday April 12, 2013. While he was in Maryland Snowden, he took time off to pay visits to both of his divorced parents. It would be the last time he would see either of them in the United States.

He returned on April 13th to Hawaii, One domestic task he to attend to was helping Mills pack up their possessions, which they stored in boxes in the garage. The lease on their house was up on April 30, 2013, so he found a temporary rental for them just a few blocks away.

On Monday April 15th, Snowden began on-the-job training as an analyst at the National Threat Operations Center—a training that he would not complete. The same week he began the training, he prepared his exit by writing Booz Allen that he needed a brief medical leave in May to undergo medical treatment for his putative epilepsy symptoms. Even though he had no planned any treatments, and, as far as is known did not suffer from epilepsy, Booz Allen required a minimum of one month's notice for foreign travel. By making the request, he lessened the likelihood that it would arouse undue suspicion when he departed Hong Kong with stolen documents on May 18, 2013. This brief window left him some four weeks to take the lists that he coveted.

Snowden carried out the heist with precision reminiscent of a "Mission Impossible" movie caper. First, he needed to get passwords to up to 24 compartments at the National Threat Operation Center that he had not been "read into." Even in the "open culture" of the NSA this was not an easy challenge since he no longer had a plausible pretext for asking other experienced threat analysts had their passwords, as he did when he was a system administrator at Dell. He would now be asking them to break strict NSA rules that prohibited intelligence workers from disclosing their passwords to an unauthorized party. In addition, they were supposed to report anyone who asked to use their passwords.

He may have obtained some passwords through deception, such as tricking them into typing in their passwords in a device that captured them. As the NSA informed Congress in 2014, three of his fellow workers told the FBI that Snowden may have deceived them to gain access their passwords. He may have also have used electronic means to have stolen the remaining passwords. In any case, however he accomplished this incredible feat, he gained access to 24 compartments containing the NSA's most closely guarded secrets in a matter of a few weeks.

Next, he had to find the lists he was seeking in a vast sea of data. He used for this task pre-programmed robotic devices, called "spiders" to crawl through the data and find the files he was after. Snowden deployed these spiders soon after he began working at the Center, raising the possibility that Snowden had prepared in advance the operation. According to the subsequent NSA damage assessment, Snowden's spiders indexed well over one million documents. Many of those that he copied and moved were from Level 3 "Sensitive Compartmented Information" according to the NSA analysis. The spiders also made his penetration relatively safe. As previously mentioned, the Hawaii base did not have a real time auditing system. So alarm bells would go off in the security office when he indexed documents.

Finally, Snowden had to find a way to transfer this data to a computer with an opened USB port. Most of the computers at the center had had their ports sealed shut to prevent unauthorized downloads. Making the transfer even more difficult, he was working as an analyst-in-training in an open-plan office with security CCTV camera.

To be sure, there were also service computers with open ports used by the system administrators. They, after all, had to perform maintenance and back-up work. Even though Snowden was no longer a system administrator, he might still have been able to steal or borrow a service computer. Yet, despite all the NSA's and Booz Allen's security measures, he managed to download hundreds of thousands of level 3 documents to an unsealed computer.

He also took some less-sensitive documents from the administrative file (which contained mainly Level 1 documents) at the end of April. These late acquisitions included the now famous warrant from the FISA court issued on April 25 2013.

He completed the operation on Friday May 17, 2013, the last day he would ever enter the NSA facility. He transferred the data he had amassed on the service computer, including the lists of the computers in Russia and China that the NSA had succeeded in penetrating, onto thumb drives. Finally, he coolly walked past the security guards at the exit, who only seldom performed random checks on NSA employees.

He had carried out the entire operation with such brilliant stealth he left few, if any clues behind to how obtained 24 of his colleagues' passwords, moved the data from many different supposedly-sealed computers to an opened service machine or how he downloaded these documents to multiple thumb drives without arousing suspicion. In fact, the theft would not be discovered by the NSA for fifteen days.

His escape was also well-prepared. Lindsay Mills had departed that morning for a planned two week visit to the outer islands. This trip allowed him to pack his belongings without saying anything to her that might be difficult to explain to the authorities. He simply left a note she would see on her return, and could show to authorities saying that he was away on a "business trip." He also called to say good-bye to his mother and sister, who had been planning to visit him in Hawaii that month.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Escape Artist

"I'm not self-destructive. I don't want to self-immolate and erase myself from the pages of history. But if we don't take chances, we can't win."

--Snowden in Moscow

The next evening Snowden drove to Honolulu International Airport. He left his leased car in the parking lot. He took with him only carry-on baggage, including a back-pack and a laptop with a TOR sticker on it. "I took everything I had on my back," he said. Before leaving he also packed in his luggage the cash that would pay for his fugitive life. Along with the cash, he took the thumb drives containing the NSA's keys to the kingdom.

At this point, Snowden was still a free man. He was not wanted by the authorities. He had provided his employer and the NSA with a medical excuse for his absence from work so he would not be immediately missed. He also had a valid passport, a credit card, and ID. He had he yet made arrangements to meet the journalists. Snowden's destination was Hong Kong. After crossing the International Date Line, Snowden waited three hours in the transit zone of Narita. Here he was reportedly captured by the airports CCTV cameras sitting alone. He then boarded a plane to Hong Kong. After the four-hour long flight from Narita, he arrived in Hong Kong early in the morning on May 20th.

He had visited Hong Kong at least once before with Lindsay Mills when he was stationed in Japan. He had also made some arrangements. According to Albert Ho, his Hong Kong Lawyer, Snowden stayed at a residence arranged for him in advance by a party whom Snowden knew prior to his arrival. This "carer," Ho said, had assisted Snowden with his logistics. For the next ten days, Snowden did not use his credit card or leave any paper trail to his location. Wherever he was, "his first priority," as he told Greenwald, was to find a place safe from US countermeasures. He brought with him a large number of electronic copies of NSA documents marked "TS/SCI/ NOFORN, which stood for Top Secret, Sensitive Compartmentalized Information and No Foreign Distribution. According to government rules, data carrying these labels could not be removed from a government-approved "SCI facility." Yet Snowden, who brought them with him into this semi-autonomous zone in China, intended to break these rules.

At this venue, Snowden apparently believed he was relatively safe. “That whole period was very carefully planned and orchestrated,” Snowden later told the *Guardian* in Moscow. Here, for the first time, Snowden communicated directly with first Gellman and then Greenwald.

He emailed Gellman under the alias “Verax

.” Already, via Poitras, he had provided this *Washington Post* journalist with power point slides from a NSA presentation about a joint FBI-NSA-CIA operation codenamed PRISM. He believed it qualified as whistle-blowing because it revealed that the NSA, in intercepting emails, tweets, postings and other Web interactions about foreign terrorists, incidentally also picked up data about Americans. According to the rules imposed on the NSA by a 2007 presidential directive, whatever information accidently picked up about Americans was supposed to be filtered out, and hundreds of compliance officers rechecked the data ever 90 says to assure that directive was being carried. Even so, it was likely some data was not expunged in this process. So PRISM could cause embarrassment for the NSA.

Snowden proposed that Gellman join him in Hong Kong. In attempting to persuade him of the urgency of the trip, he wrote him that he had reason to believe that “omniscient State powers” imperiled “our freedom and way of life.” He noted, with a touch of modesty, “Perhaps I am naïve.” He added dramatically “I have risked my life and family.” Even so, Gellman declined coming to Hong Kong. (According to Greenwald, Gellman could not make the trip because lawyers for the *Washington Post* were uneasy with having a reporter receive classified documents in a part of China.)

Next, on May 24, 2013, Snowden attempted to apply more pressure on Gellman by telling him that the story about the PRISM program had to be published by the *Post* within 72 hours. Gellman could not accede to such a condition because the decision of when to publish a story was made not by him but by the editors of the newspaper. He told Snowden that the earliest the story could be published was June 6, 2013, which was well past Snowden’s deadline.

Snowden next turned to Greenwald. Both Poitras and Micah Lee had made great efforts to tutor Greenwald on encryption protocols, with Lee, who was in Berkeley, California, sending Greenwald by Fedex a DVD that would allow him to receive both encrypted messages and phone calls. Even then, Greenwald was unable to fully install it. As a result, Greenwald still had not met Snowden’s requisites on encrypting his computer.

In addition, possibly because of a lost message, Snowden believed that Greenwald was reluctant to fly to the place that he designated for a meeting. With Gellman uncertain, Greenwald was now essential to his plan. If he was to have any newspaper outlet, he needed to persuade Greenwald to come to Hong Kong. At this point, he took matters in to his own hands. On May 25, 2013, Snowden somewhat aggressively emailed Greenwald “You recently had to decline short-term travel to meet with me." He added pointedly "You need to be involved in this story." To further convince him, he suggested that they immediately speak on the phone via a website that encrypts conversations. The subsequent conversation lasted, according to Greenwald, two hours.

Snowden began the encrypted call by complaining, "I don't like how this is developing." He made it clear that he, not the journalist he had selected, was pulling the strings. If Greenwald wanted the scoop, he had to follow Snowden's instructions, which included dividing the scoops between the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*. According to his plan, Gellman would break the PRISM story in the *Washington Post* and Greenwald would break the "mass domestic spying" story in the *Guardian*. In addition, he insisted that the *Guardian* publish his personal manifesto alongside its story. As he envisioned it, the media event would also include a video component in which Greenwald would interview him.

Once Greenwald agreed to this micro-managing, Snowden would send him what he called a "welcome package" of documents to demonstrate his good faith. His plan also required a face-to-face meeting. When Greenwald said he was aboard the project, Snowden told him "the first order of business is to get you to Hong Kong."

Snowden next sent him 20 classified NSA documents labeled "TOP SECRET." He also included in the package his personal manifesto, which asserted that the NSA was part of an international conspiracy of intelligence agencies that were working to "inflict upon the world a system of secret, pervasive surveillance from which there is no refuge."

Meanwhile, Snowden told Poitras, he was sending her a number of NSA documents including a recent FISA warrant. It had been issued less than a month earlier. He wanted that FISA warrant to serve as the basis of Greenwald's scoop. It was perfect whistle-blowing material for the *Guardian* because it ordered Verizon to turn over all its billing records for 90 days to the NSA. It was as close to a smoking gun as anything he had copied at the NSA. It would also get attention since James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, had stated before Congress just two months earlier that the NSA did not collect phone data in America. This warrant would allow the *Guardian*, in the best tradition of "Gotcha" journalism, to catch Clapper in an apparent lie.

Continuing his string-pulling, he instructed Poitras not to show the FISA warrant to Greenwald until they were safely aboard the plane. That measure would prevent Greenwald from releasing the story without coming to Hong Kong. He also sent Poitras an entire encrypted file of NSA documents, saying it would "include my true name and details for the record, though it will be your decision as to whether or how to declare my involvement." He did not send her the key to decipher the file, saying "The key will follow when everything else is done." He further told her that he preferred that her film focus on him as the sole perpetrator of the leak so that no one else at the NSA would be suspected. He instructed her "Your destination is Hong Kong."

Poitras and Gellman were not the only journalists involved in the news event. Poitras also asked the hacktavist Jacob Appelbaum to help her interview Snowden about the NSA's operations. She later said that she needed someone with technical expertise in government surveillance to test the bona fides of Citizen 4. She believed that Appelbaum, who had participated in her anti-NSA presentations in 2012, qualified for the position.

As it turns out, Appelbaum was already known to Snowden. Appelbaum had communicated with Snowden under his Oahu Crypto party alias about an obscure piece of software just a few after Snowden had met with Runa Sandvik in Hawaii in 2012. Appelbaum, after all, was Sandvik's long-time ally in developing the use of TOR software. However he learned about him, Snowden allowed Appelbaum to put to him detailed questions to concerning the secret operations of the NSA before he met with Poitras and Greenwald in Hong Kong. Indeed, Poitras joined him in asking Snowden via encrypted emails, such questions as: "What are some of the big surveillance programs that are active today and how do international partners aid the NSA?" "Does the NSA partner with other nations, like Israel?" and "Do private companies help the NSA?" Snowden answered them all to the satisfaction of Appelbaum and Poitras. (The interview was published on June16, 2013 with Snowden's approval on the website of *Der Spiegel*, the German weekly, which had also published the Wikileaks documents.)

Even though the days were ticking away while Snowden was waiting for him in Hong Kong, Greenwald still had to overcome a final hurdle at the *Guardian*. He needed to get a green light to go to Hong Kong from Janine Gibson, the editor of the *Guardian* website, who was based in New York. Under Gibson's leadership, the *Guardian's* website effectively "gone into the business of publishing government secrets," as *Guardian* columnist Michael Wolff pointed out. Most of these secrets had been supplied by Manning via Wikileaks. Few, if any of these previous documents the *Guardian* published were highly-classified and none were SCI top secret documents. The NSA documents Greenwald had received from Citizen 4 were another matter. They contained the sort of SCI communications intelligence data that no major newspaper had ever published before. Their disclosure could even result in journalists being imprisoned since both U.S. and British law criminalized the disclosure by anyone of communications intelligence. As a lawyer, Greenwald recognized this danger. On the other hand, the NSA documents were far more explosive than the Wikileaks material, and promised an even greater spike in circulation. So Greenwald assumed that Gibson would be willing to authorize the publication of the documents—and provide the expenses for his trip to Hong Kong to meet the source.

He flew from Rio to New York on May 30, 2013 to meet in person with Gibson, who had concerns about publishing what purported to be top secret documents that came from an anonymous source. For one thing, she was also not willing to go along with Citizen 4's demand that the *Guardian* publish his personal manifesto alongside the documents. Aside from its shrill and alarming tone, it sounded, as she told Greenwald, "a bit Ted Kaczynski-ish." She was referring to Ted Kaczinski, the deranged mathematician who had maimed or killed 23 people with anonymous mail bombs between 1978 and 1995. Like Citizen 4/Snowden, Kaczynski had demanded that newspapers publish his personal manifesto. She explained to Greenwald, “It is going to sound crazy to some people.” Her concern was that it would detract from the credibility of the rest of the story. Snowden had also written Greenwald a letter explain his position. “Even the Constitution is subverted when the appetites of power demand it,” Snowden asserted, and paraphrasing President Thomas Jefferson, he continued. “Let us speak no more of faith in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of cryptography.” Snowden, showing his cult-like faith in encryption, had “cryptography” for Jefferson’s word “constitution. Despite his Jeffersonian rhetoric, she decided against publishing it or the Manifesto. The stolen NSA documents were another matter. They were an enormous scoop that could have a greater impact than the Wikileaks scoop. .She was not about to miss publishing it.

She authorized Greenwald’s trip to Hong Kong on the condition that he take with him a Guardian staffer in whom she had confidence. He was Scottish-born Ewen MacAskill, a 61-year old veteran journalist who had been the Washington bureau chief for the *Guardian*. His assignment was to evaluate the mystery source in Hong Kong for Gibson. Greenwald accepted her terms. Poitras, who would be accompanying them, would be paying her own way.

Snowden, for his part, had a contingency plan in place in case the *Guardian* failed to publish the story. While Greenwald was negotiating with Gibson, he arranged for Micah Lee, Poitras’ associate at the Freedom of the Press Foundation, to build a personal website for him. Writing Lee from Hong Kong under both his alias Anon108 and his real name, Snowden said that he planned to post on it his “anti-surveillance manifesto.” He would also use it to post “a global petition against surveillance. (A year earlier his girlfriend Mills had also asked her followers on her “super hero” blog to sign a petition against government interference with the Internet.) Snowden had Lee name the site “Supportonlinerights.com.” According to Lee, the website would be build with a “dead man’s switch,” which would automatically trigger the release of NSA documents if he was arrested. It was not clear whether Lee was doing this work as a freelancer or in his capacity as the chief technology officer for the Freedom of the Press Foundation. After Lee built the website for Snowden It proved unnecessary to activate it since Poitras emailed Snowden that the *Guardian* had approved the trip, and she and Greenwald were booked on a Cathay Pacific flight to Hong Kong. They would arrive on June 2, 2013,

In his preparation to go public in Hong Kong, Snowden showed himself fully capable of orchestrating what would become a major news story. He not only picked the journalists who would break it, but he instructed each of them as to the timing, sequence, and content of their initial disclosures. In the security of his residence in Hong Kong, he also worked to carefully separate the purloined NSA documents into two very different caches. "I carefully evaluated every single document I disclosed,” Snowden explained to the *Guardian* journalists in early June 2013. The documents in this first cache were selected to serve what he termed the “public interest.” In the hands of journalists, these selected documents, and the story he fashioned to accompany them, would burnish his image in the public consciousness as a whistle blower. He did not turn over the second cache, telling Greenwald, “There are all sorts of documents that would have made a big impact that I didn't turn over.”

By the time he received the message from Poitras on June 1st, Snowden had finished his preparations for the journalists. With selected documents copied on a thumb drive, he moved from the residence where he had been staying for ten days to a venue for meeting the reporters. The place he chose was the five-star, $330 a day, Mira hotel in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong. He checked into room 1014 under his own name and provided the front desk with his own credit card. He next emailed Poitras his name and the address of the Mira hotel. There was no longer any reason to hide his true identity because the rendezvous with journalists would make him famous in a matter of days.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Whistle-blower

"They elected me. The overseers... The [American] system failed comprehensively, and each level of oversight, each level of responsibility that should have addressed this, abdicated their responsibility."

--Edward Snowden in Moscow

While Snowden was attempting to reel in the journalists in Hong Kong, Lindsay Mills received a jarring surprise in Hawaii. When she returned to Honolulu from her "island-hopping" trip, she found Snowden was still away and the rented house partially flooded from a leak. The brief note Snowden left her indicated that her eight year relationship with Snowden had, at least temporarily, been put on hold by him. "I feel alone, lost, overwhelmed, and desperate for a reprieve from the bipolar nature of my current situation," she wrote in her journal on June 2nd (which would be June 3rd across the international time line in Hong Kong.) "I've nearly lost my mind, family, and house over the past few weeks." She also noted that she her SIM card containing her personal data was gone. She wrote in her on-line journal" "Oh and I physically lost my memory card with nearly all my adventure photos." The loss would make it difficult to reconstruct her past activities with Snowden.

In Hong Kong, if Snowden was following Lindsay's online journal, he would have read that his girl friend had returned home, lost her data and needed a "reprieve" from the situation in which he had put her. But since they were exchanging private text messages by then, he would not have needed to consult her public journal. Snowden was certainly aware that he would soon be the object of a manhunt that could involve those with whom he was acquainted. He instructed Poitras to mask their email communications in cyber space "so we don't have a clue or record of your true name in your file communication chain." Such precautions were necessary, he explained to her because "every trick in the book is likely to be used in looking into this."

The journalists arrived late in the evening of June 2nd, 2013. Snowden's message was waiting. Snowden's instructions were themselves an exercise in control. Snowden had written them: "On timing, regarding meeting up in Hong Kong, the first rendezvous attempt will be at 10 A.M. local time. We will meet in the hallway outside of the restaurant in the Mira Hotel. I will be working on a Rubik's cube so that you can identify me. Approach me and ask if I know the hours of the restaurant. I'll respond by stating that I'm not sure and suggest you try the lounge instead. I'll offer to show you where it is, and at that point we're good. You simply need to follow naturally." Even though such tradecraft was unnecessary since Snowden was registered at the hotel under his true name, he had provided the journalists with the atmospherics of "an international spy thriller," as Greenwald subsequently described the instructions.

MacAskill had stayed at the W Hotel when Poitras and Greenwald Poitras went to the Mira Hotel. Poitras did not want to bring along an uninvited guest to the first meeting with Citizen Four. As instructed, at 10 AM on June 3rd, she and Greenwald went to the Mira restaurant. They gave the recognition signal, twice. After a few minutes, a young man walked over to them, holding a Rubik cube. Greenwald noted: "The first thing I saw was the unsolved Rubik's cube twirling in the man's left hand." The man said "Hello" and introduced himself as "Ed Snowden." Greenwald was particularly surprised by Snowden's boyish looks. "The initial impression was one of extreme confusion," Greenwald wrote in his book. "I was expecting to meet somebody in his sixties or seventies, someone very senior in the agency, because I knew almost nothing about him prior to our arrival in Hong Kong." His initial confusion was understandable. Snowden, it will be recalled, had falsely identified himself to them in an email as a senior member of the intelligence community.

Snowden led Greenwald and Poitras through various corridors of the hotel to his room, 1014. It was in a single room mainly occupied by a king-sized bed. Its other furniture included a sleek writing desk in the corner, a modernistic chair and a tall lamp. The bathroom was behind a glass partition, which could be closed off by a black louver blind. There was also a small refrigerator in the minibar in which Snowden asked them to stow their cell phones,

Snowden had already told Poitras that he wanted her to make a documentary of the meeting. She therefore wasted no time in mounting her camera on a tripod. "Minutes after meeting, I set up the camera." Snowden had told her, as she later recalled, "when you are involved in an action which is likely to get you indicted, you typically don't have a camera rolling in the room." Nevertheless, he allowed her to film his actions for the next eight days. One possible reason is that he had no intention of standing trial. In any case, as Poitras found out, Snowden was anything but camera shy. Over the next week, she would shoot over 20 hours of Snowden's activities in that small room. It was essentially a one man show, a presentation of him, by himself, for the appreciation of a global public. Poitras knew virtually nothing about her subject until ten minutes before she began filming him. She had not even googled him, since she was concerned that her Internet search might alert the NSA and law enforcement authorities

In an extraordinary waiver of his own privacy, he allowed her to film him washing in the bathroom, preening his hair in the mirror, napping on his bed, getting dressed, and packing his bag. He even permitted her to film a private computer exchange between him and Mills (who was in Honolulu.) Mills now informed Snowden that two government investigators had come to their home in Hawaii. Mills reported that they were asking her about Snowden's whereabouts. Evidently when he had failed to show up for work on June 1st, it set off alarm bells at Booz Allen and the NSA. Snowden expressed anger to the journalists in the room at the NSA intrusion on the privacy of his girlfriend (although he had left her in the lurch by telling her in the note he was away on a brief business trip.)

Snowden also performed his security procedures on camera, including stuffing bed pillows under the door to block any eaves-droppers, throwing a red blanket over his head, which he called jokingly his "magical cloak of power." He explained to Greenwald that his donned his "cloak" when he turned on his laptop to prevent any hidden cameras in the room from spotting his password. He also checked the hotel phone for bugs. It was not without irony that he went through these security rituals to protect his data as he allowed Poitras to film NSA data on his computer screen. Since he planned to use these journalists as his outlets to go public in a few days, the security measures he did while on camera would only serve a temporary purpose.

The centerpiece of the planned video would take the form of an interview with Greenwald. Snowden himself provided the talking points. The filming would eventually provide Poitras with a feature-length movie, *CitizenFour,* which would be commercially released in October 2014 and win an Academy Award for her.

The next day, Wednesday June 4th, Ewen MacAskill, the *Guardian* editor, joined Poitras and Greenwald in Snowden's room. Snowden insisted that he also go through the ritual of stowing his cell phone in the mini-bar refrigerator. Not without irony, Snowden's own phone can be seen on his bed recharging. Although MacAskill was sent by Gibson to the event to verify the source's bona fides, he apparently had not been well briefed. The questioning went as follows:

MacAskill: Sorry, I don't know anything about you.

Snowden: OK, I work for—

MacAskill: Sorry, I don't know even your name.

Snowden: Oh, sorry, my name is Edward Snowden. I go by Ed

MacAskill went on to ask him to enumerate the various positions he held during his career in intelligence. Snowden was not entirely truthful in describing himself. He said that he had been a senior adviser to the CIA, when he had been just a telecommunications support officer in the CIA. He also said he had been a senior adviser at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) even though, according to that intelligence service, he was not actually ever employed there. (He merely spoke at an interagency counterintelligence course the DIA had sponsored.) He said he had a $200,000 a year salary from Booz Allen when, according to Booz Allen, it was $133,000. It is understandable that he wanted to impress these *Guardian* journalists in light of his young age and boyish appearance, even to the extent of meretriciously claiming in the video that he personally had been given the "authority" at the NSA to intercept President Obama's private communications, which, according to a NSA spokeswoman, was not true. No NSA employee, and certainly not a civilian contract worker, was given the authority to soy on the President of the United States, she insisted. Such career enhancements suggest that Snowden altered factual reality when it suits his purpose with journalists.

Even though Snowden had greatly exaggerated the positions he held with the CIA and DIA, no effort was made to check them by the team of journalists. Instead, MacAskill wrote Janine Gibson in New York "The Guinness is good." It was a pre-arranged code by which MacAskill certified Snowden's credibility for the *Guardian*. Gibson told Greenwald to proceed with the story.

Greenwald wrote his first story about NSA transgression based almost entirely on the FISA warrant that Snowden had copied from the administrative file. Before the story could be published, however, the *Guardian* policy required relevant American government officials be allowed to respond. Gibson made the requisite, if pro forma, call to the White House National Security spokesman, Caitlin Hayden, who arranged a conference call with FBI Deputy Director Sean Joyce, NSA Deputy Director Chris Inglis and Robert Litt, the legal officer for the Office of National Intelligence. After duly taking into account the response of these three officials, which included the admonition by Litt "no serious news organization would publish this," Gibson gave the green light to publish the story. It was, after all, an incredible scoop.

The story finally broke finally on June 5, 2013. "NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers," proclaimed the *Guardian* headline. Under Greenwald's byline, it said: "Exclusive: Top Secret Court Order Requesting Verizon To Hand Over Call Data Shows The Scale of Domestic Surveillance Under Obama." Along with it was the FISA warrant to Verizon. The PRISM story broke hours later in the *Washington Post*. Written by Gellman and Poitras, it claimed that the NSA and FBI were tapping directly into the central servers of nine leading U.S, Internet companies which were knowingly participating on the operation. The latter allegation turned out to be not entirely true, since all the Internet companies cited in the story denied that they had knowingly participated. But the damage had been done. The back-to-back publication of these two stories by the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* provided the explosive "shock," at least in the global media, that Snowden had predicted.

Snowden's identity had not been revealed in either the *Guardian* or *Washington Post* stories on June 5th. Snowden, however, insisted on outing himself. He explained to Greenwald that he needed to "define himself" before the US Government "demonized" him as a spy. That self-definition would be accomplished by the 12 minute video, entitled "Whistleblower." For it, Poitras extracted from the 20 hours she had shot much of the material for the video. In the filmed interview, Snowden voiced many of the same statements he had made in his manifesto. So he no longer needed to post the manifesto on the Internet. Instead, he used the video to broadcast his views. When he insisted on the immediate airing of the video, Greenwald told him that by going public in this way he was saying "fuck you" to the American government. Snowden replied, "I want to identify myself as the person behind these disclosures."

On June 9th, the video was posted on the *Guardian* website with the Freedom of the Press Foundation getting an on-screen credit. "My name is Ed Snowden," the extraordinary disclosure began. He then described how the NSA was watching U.S. citizens. Even though the NSA subsequently disputed some his more dramatic claims, such as his assertion that he had the authority at the NSA "to wiretap anyone, even the President," the press largely accepted his claims as established facts. As for American surveillance, he declared "I don't want to live in a society that does those sorts of things."

He had succeeded in defining himself for the public. The *Guardian* story accompanying the video carried the headline, "EDWARD SNOWDEN: THE WHISTLE BLOWER BEHIND THE NSA SURVEILLANCE REVELATIONS." Snowden's identity as a whistle-blower was now established in the media. Overnight, Snowden became a global celebrity and, to much of the world, a hero.

Snowden, in fact, did not sacrifice him. He vanished from public view after the release of the video. He provided Poitras and Greenwald with thumb drives on which he had loaded the documents he wanted them to use. The next morning he packed his belongings into a backpack and moved, without notifying the front desk, to the room Poitras had rented at the Mira.

Complicated schemes, especially when they involve transferring state secrets to unauthorized parties in a foreign country, do not necessarily go as planned. On the morning of June 10th, 2013, Snowden's escape plan apparently ran into a problem. Robert Tibbo and Jonathan Mann, the lawyers who, along with Albert Ho, had been retained for Snowden by an unidentified party, received an emergency phone call early in the morning telling them to help Snowden move to a safe location. Although Tibbo would not identify the person who had called, the message had been relayed to Mann and him through Ho's office. He told Tibbo over the phone, "I can make myself unrecognizable"

Tibbo and Mann immediately proceeded to the mall adjacent to the Mira hotel, where they met Snowden. After he signed a document appointing Ho's law firm as his "legal adviser," they slipped out of via the mall exit.

As his credit card had been frozen, it is not clear who paid his $3,300 hotel bill. According to hotel records, it was paid by another credit card. Poitras, who taken a room at the hotel may have used her credit card or Snowden may have had another benefactor in Hong Kong. In any case, the lawyers escorted Snowden to a pre-arranged residence.

"I am in a safe house for now," Snowden wrote Greenwald on June 11th. The situation may not have been totally under his control, since he added: "But I have no idea how safe it is."

Greenwald flew back to Brazil that day. Soon afterward, he would resign from the Guardian and in February 2014 become the co-founding editor of *The Intercept*, an online publication dedicated to adversarial journalism which was backed by Internet billionaire Pierre Omidyar.

Poitras remained in Hong Kong, where she moved, along with *Guardian* reporter MacAskill, to the five-star Sheraton Hong Kong Tower, which, like the Mira hotel, was on Nathan Road in Kowloon. Her next task was to set up what was to be Snowden's final interview in Hong Kong. It was scheduled for June 12th.

The journalist chosen was Lana Lam, a young Australian reporter working for the *South China Morning Post*. Tibbo had suggested Lam to Snowden. She had served as Tibbo's outlet on previous news stories, and, as he told me, he found her to be a totally reliable journalist. He brought her to Poitras' suite at the Sheraton in Kowloon (about eight blocks down Nathan Road from the Mira.) First, Lam had to agree to the conditions of the interview, which included submitting the story to Poitras for Snowden's approval. Next, as Lam put it, Poitras "confiscated" her cell phone. Finally, after a ten minute wait, Poitras took her to another room and sat her before a black laptop. The laptop, which had a TOR sticker on it, had on its screen an on-line chat room where she was connected by Poitras to Snowden.

"Hi Lana, thanks for coming for this," Snowden said from his safe house. He told her that the NSA had intercepted data from at least 61,000 different computers in Hong Kong, China, and elsewhere. To expose what he called America's "hypocrisy" in accusing China of cyber-espionage, he supplied her NSA documents for the *South China Morning Post*. "Last week the American government happily operated in the shadows with no respect for the consent of the governed, but no longer," he said. "The United States government has committed a tremendous number of crimes against Hong Kong [and] the People's Republic of China as well." Under Poitras' close supervision, Lam was allowed to ask Snowden further questions about the NSA's interception of communications in Hong Kong and China. He told her "I have had many opportunities to flee Hong Kong, but I would rather stay and fight the US government in the courts."

As mentioned earlier, Greenwald, Poitras and MacAskill did not concern themselves with the issue of the mechanics of the largest theft of top secret documents in the history of the United States. In entire filmed interview at the Mira Hotel, they did not ask their source how he managed to get access to the documents. Unlike those interviews, Lam asked him about how he widened his access. She cut to the core of the matter by asking him a crucial question. "Why he had switched jobs from Dell SecureWorks to Booz Allen Hamilton in March 2013? His answer provided her with a real scoop He replied that, "My position with Booz Allen Hamilton granted me access to lists of machines all over the world the NSA hacked." Snowden told her that he deliberately went to Booz Allen Hamilton to get access to the "lists" revealing the NSA's sources in foreign countries. This admission could gravely complicate his legal situation in Hong Kong since it suggested that he meant to steal documents even before he had known their content. In fact, to protect himself, he restricted Lam from publishing this part of the interview until *after* he had departed Hong Kong. (It was published until June 24, 2013 a day after he arrived in Russia.) This condition indicated to Lam that as early as June 12th, if not before that, he was planning on leaving Hong Kong (although he did not tell her his next destination.)

His interview with Lam went only so far. He didn't reveal how he had learned about these "lists" before taking the job. Nor did he reveal to her how he planned to dispose of these lists. He made it clear to her, however, that he had not yet disposed of all his secret documents. "If I have time to go through this information," he said, "I would like to make it available to journalists in each country to make their own assessment, independent of my bias, as to whether or not the knowledge of U.S. network operations against their people should be published." So as late as June 14th, Snowden was still reading and assessing the files he had stolen from the NSA four weeks earlier.

Poitras vetted the Lam interview. Soon afterwards she suspected that she was being followed. That was likely since by this June 14th all the intelligence services in Hong Kong knew that she was in contact with Snowden. "I was being tailed," she recalled in an interview with a *Vogue* reporter in Berlin in 2014. "The risks became very great," she said in describing her situation in Hong Kong. So, on June 15th, she left Hong Kong and flew back to Berlin, where she began editing her footage of the Snowden interview.

Meanwhile, Snowden was organizing his own exit from Hong Kong. He placed a call to Julian Assange.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Enter Assange

“Thanks to Russia (and thanks to WikiLeaks), Snowden remains free.” – Julian Assange

Born on July 3, 1971 in Queensland, Australia, Julian Assange had made a brilliant career of trafficking in state, military and corporate secrets. While still a teen-ager, using the alias “Mendax” (the untruthful one), he had hacked into the computers of the Pentagon, the U.S. Navy, NASA, Citibank, Lockheed-Martin and Australia's Overseas Telecommunications Commission. At the age of 25, pleaded guilty to 25 charges of hacking in Australia, but was released on a good behavior bond. In 2006, with the spread of TOR software, he co-founded Wikileaks, a website in which secret documents could anonymously be sent and posted. The site received little public attention until Bradley Manning sent it several hundred thousand lowly-classified U.S. military and State Department documents in April 2010. With these stolen documents, Wikileaks became a media sensation and Assange, the runner-up for *Time*’s Man-of-the Year for 2010, became a leading figure, along with Appelbaum, in the global hacktavist underground. In November 2010, however, he also ran into a legal problem. A judge in Stockholm, Sweden ordered his detention on suspicion of rape, sexual molestation and unlawful coercion. He denied the charges but he was arrested in London on a European arrest warrant for him. In December, he was released on a $312,700 bail deposit (supplied by his supporters) and confined to Ellingham Hall in Norfolk, England. While awaiting the outcome of the extradition proceedings, he lived there with Sarah Harrison, his 28- year deputy at Wikileaks. A graduate of the elite Sevenoaks School in Kent, she also served as Assange’s liaison with the outside world. Although she officially was given the title “investigative editor” of Wikileaks, she worked so closely with Assange during this period that the British press carried stories saying she was his paramour. During this period, Harrison also worked on a Wiki leak’s documentary entitled “Mediastan/” The film concerned Wikileaks’ exposure of US secret operations in Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. It was also a project which took her to Russia and provided her with a multi-entry Russian visa.

In June 2012, after the extradition order was upheld, he jumped bail and fled to the Ecuador embassy in London. For the next year, his only visible means of income was a weekly program from the embassy. It was sponsored by RT Television, a Moscow-based English-language news channel funded by the Russian government, which would also finance and release “Mediastan.”

Snowden telephoned Assange at his refuge at the Ecuador embassy on June 10, 2013. According to Assange, Snowden needed his help for his exit plan. He wanted Assange to use Wikileaks’ “resources” to get him out of Hong Kong. Assange considered it a surprising request since Snowden had not given any of the stolen documents to Wikileaks. In their discussion, according to Assange, Snowden claimed that one reason he decided to take the secret NSA documents was the brutal treatment of Bradley Manning after he was arrested in 2010 by the US government. "Snowden told me they had abused Manning in a way that contributed to his decision to become a whistleblower," Assange said in an interview in 2015. If Manning's mistreatment was Snowden's motive, it was a sharp departure from the position that Snowden had taken in his postings on the *Ars Technica* site in January 2009. He complained in a post on *Ars Technica* about the detrimental consequences to U.S. intelligence of leakers revealing "classified shit" to the *New York Times*, and he suggested as punishment "those people should be shot in the balls." Either he either had a change of heart about punishment or he was telling Assange what he believed he wanted to hear.

Assange did not suggest that Snowden go to Ecuador to seek asylum. He counseled him to go directly to Russia. "My advice was that he should take asylum in Russia despite the negative PR consequences," he told the (London) *Times* in 2015. He found "Snowden was well aware of the spin that would be put on it if he took asylum in Russia." Assange had another way for Snowden to defuse the "PR consequences" of Snowden landing in Moscow. A story would be released, coinciding with his departure, asserting that Snowden was "bound for the republic of Ecuador via a safe route."

When Snowden asked how he would carry out the plan, Assange told Snowden that he would immediately dispatch one of his senior staff members to help him engineer his escape to Russia. That senior staff member was Sarah Harrison,

After speaking to Snowden, Assange called Harrison, who was in Melbourne, Australia. She had gone there a month earlier to help organize Assange's somewhat quixotic election campaign for President of Australia, Assange now told her to forget the campaign and go to Hong Kong. Her mission there was to use Wikileaks resources to save Snowden from "a life time in prison." Presumably, he also told her that he advised Snowden to proceed to Russia, where Harrison had a visa since part of her work on the Mediastan film was done in Moscow.

Harrison did not hesitate in following Assange's instructions. She later said that she didn't even bother to pack her clothing. She caught the next plane out of Australia.

After an eight hour flight, she arrived in Hong Kong on June 11th—the same day that Snowden texted Greenwald he was in a safe house. Harrison had her own connections in Hong Kong. Both her two younger sisters, Kate and Alexandra Harrison, who had also attended Sevenoaks, lived there and were part of the expatriate community. She also had an older brother, Simon Harrison, who headed Avro, a ship brokerage and commodity trading company. Although headquartered in Singapore, Avro also operated out of Hong Kong, and he frequently travelled there.

Like Poitras, Harrison took great care to shield her movements. She did not even have a Twitter, Facebook or any other social media account. She made it a point not to own a cell phone for fear of being tracked by an intelligence service. When she travelled, she bought "burner" phones locally and disposed of them before any calls could be traced back to her. A precaution she took that June was not to meet Snowden face-to-face out of concern about the surveillance of American intelligence in Hong Kong. Instead, for her first 13 days in Hong Kong, she worked behind the scenes, through intermediaries. Her task was not only to arrange his escape route but also to create diversions to camouflage his real destination. Under Assange's tutelage, she had made deceptive ploys an integral parts of her trade craft. "We were working very hard to lay as many false trails as possible," she later told an interviewer in Berlin. According to Assange, she booked decoy flights for Snowden to Beijing, China and New Delhi, India. She also used Snowden's credit card numbers to pay for the flight to India, She knew that since the card was blocked, there was a high probability that it would come to the attention of US intelligence. In all, according to Harrison, she booked no fewer than dozen such decoy tickets to confuse Snowden's pursuers in US and British intelligence. The only actual tickets she bought for Snowden, according to an Aeroflot official, was a one-way ticket to Moscow. She paid for it at the last minute. She also bought a ticket for self on the same flight leaving on June 23, 2013.

The source of the money for the Assange-Harrison operation was unclear. Subsequently, Harrison said she was setting up secret bank accounts to help organize escape, but in Hong Kong in 2013, Assange says she was using "Wikileaks' resources." Harrison said the "Wikileaks team" helped fund Snowden's flight to Russia from Hong Kong, as well as her own flight there. But Wikileaks in June 2013 was not an organization with spare cash. Assange had forfeited his own bail by fleeing the embassy of Ecuador, offending many of his financial supporters in Britain. He also all but exhausted his bank account. Aside from money that dribbled in from Poitras' five-month old Freedom of the Press Foundation, the only visible source of funds for Wikileaks was the previously-mentioned payments Assange received from RT Television. British intelligence officers who reportedly subsequently examined Wikileaks' bank finances in London found no transfers to the "Wikileaks team" in Hong Kong.

While Harrison was organizing Snowden's escape, she remained in the deep background. Meanwhile, mounting pressure was brought on the Hong Kong government to take action by the U.S. On June 16th, the U.S. government informed the Hong Kong authorities that it had filed a criminal complaint against Snowden and would be seeking his extradition. Since Hong Kong had a vigorously enforced extradition agreement with the United States, the Hong Kong authority would be expected by the US to take Snowden into custody. But Hong Kong was not entirely independent in national security issues. China had the final say in any extradition decision. In fact, China had explicitly been given the right of vetoing any extraditions for any reason in the formal 1999 agreement between Hong Kong and the U.S. Since its President had just met with President Obama in California, China also had an interest in avoiding embarrassing public demonstrations on behalf of Snowden. After he had held his press event, it wanted him out of Hong Kong. According to a well-placed official in Hong Kong, it told the Hong Kong Authority in no uncertain terms that Snowden had to be out of Hong Kong by the end of the week, or June 23rd.

On June 19th, Snowden had a meeting with Tibbo, the barrister who would handle the court case, and Mann and Ho, the Hong Kong solicitors who had been retained for him. It took place in a small apartment where, according to Ho, they ate pizza while they discussed Snowden's options.

Tibbo had a strategy for Snowden. It required that Snowden remain in Hong Kong, allow himself to be arrested, seek bail and fight extradition in court. Tibbo said he planned to mount a powerful legal defense against extradition by using a provision in Hong Kong's extradition treaty with the United States that protects fugitives from persecution on political grounds. After he told Snowden that it would entail a long court battle, Snowden asked him if he could avoid even being arrested.

Tibbo explained that Hong Kong courts, which closely follow British law, would certainly issue an arrest warrant for him immediately after the US formally filed charges against him. Those charges could come within hours, he reckoned. Soon afterwards, Snowden would be temporarily jailed and his computers, electronic gear and thumb drives would be seized and placed in the custody of the court. Tibbo would immediately seek his release on bail but could not guarantee an outcome since Snowden, who had fled U.S. jurisdiction, might be considered a flight risk. If so, Snowden could remain incarcerated during the long court battle. Even so, during the litigation, Snowden would have a platform to make his case against US surveillance. Indeed, Tibbo's strategy involved building massive public support for Snowden's cause.

Once the US government filed charges, he could further expect it would invalidate his passport to go anywhere except for his return to the US and Interpol would issue a red alert to all its members. Since the case involved national security secrets, the Hong Kong court might also deny him any use of the Internet until the case was settled. If Snowden wanted to leave Hong Kong, he had to act swiftly.

Tibbo, although evasive on the point when I interviewed him, may not have known about the escape Harrison was planning As far as he could see, Snowden's other alternatives were not good. He had no money and his credit card had been blocked. He had no visas to go any other country and Interpol would issue its own "red notice" as soon as the US filed formal charges against him. At that point, Hong Kong airport authorities would be officially notified and could prevent him from leaving the city. Even if he somehow got out, he would be an international fugitive. Tibbo counseled Snowden to seek redress in the Hong Kong courts.

But Snowden had no intention of allowing himself to be arrested. Despite what he told Lana Lam only one week earlier, at least for publication, about his determination to seek justice in the Hong Kong courts, he had not planned to use Hong Kong as anything more than a temporary stop over on his escape route. Two later months later and safely in Moscow, he made this point clear in a lengthily interview with Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the *Guardian*. He told him that it never had been part of his plan to use Hong Kong to escape the legal consequences of his act. “The purpose of my mission [to Hong Kong] was to get the information to journalists.” If so, he had been merely using Tibbo, Mann and Ho to provide him with temporary cover while, following the instructions of Assange, Harrison laid down the smokescreen for his escape to Moscow.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Fugitive

"If I end up in chains in Guantanamo, I can live with that."

- —Edward Snowden, Hong Kong

During his interview with Poitras and Greenwald, Snowden said stoically "If I am arrested, I am arrested." His fatalistic words notwithstanding, Snowden had made plans to seek a haven from American justice well before his meeting with journalists in Hong Kong. As early as May 24, 2013, Snowden had suggested to Gellman that he was making arrangements with a foreign government. To that end, he asked Gellman to insert an encrypted key in Internet version of the NSA expose that Snowden proposed he write for the *Washington Post*. He told him the purpose of the encrypted key was to assist him with a foreign government. Snowden did not identify that foreign government to Gellman so Gellman knew that Snowden wanted to "seek asylum" overseas. He decided against assisting him. "I can't help him evade U.S. jurisdiction—I don't want to, and I can't," he later explained. "It's not my job. It's not the relationship. I am a journalist."

Although Gellman suspected that Iceland might be the foreign government in question, Snowden, as it turned, had not ever contacted the consulate of Iceland while he was in Hong Kong. "We had heard nothing from Snowden," an Iceland government official told *Vanity Fair*.

Snowden also did not contact the government of Ecuador in Hong Kong. In late June, while Harrison was laying down false tracks for Snowden in Hong Kong, Assange in London asked Fidel Narváez, who was a friend of his and the legal attaché in the London embassy of Ecuador, to issue a document that Snowden could use. But this document was not delivered to Snowden in Hong Kong (and later it was invalidated by Ecuador.) If Snowden had really planned to go to Ecuador from Moscow, it would require him first going to Cuba. Cuba did not even require a U.S. passport (as, in 2013, U.S, citizens were not supposed to travel to Cuba.) He did require a Cuban travel document, which he could have obtained from the Cuban consulate any time during his month in Hong Kong. Yet he did not ever obtain it. Nor did he acquire a visa to go to any other country in Latin America or elsewhere. So where was he headed?

Whatever foreign government with which Snowden was dealing earlier in May presumably did not have an extradition treaty with the United States. Yet few other foreign governments, which did not have active extradition treaties with the United States, could be directly reached by air.

With three notable exceptions, the flights to them had stopovers in a country that was an ally of the US, and which could seize Snowden. The three exceptions were China, North Korea (via China) and Russia.

The only one of these three countries, or any other country, that Snowden is known to have dealt with directly during his 33 day stay in Hong Kong, was Russia. As previously discussed, he had dealings with Russian "diplomatic representatives ", as Putin called them. Putin did not provide the date of these contacts but he provided an intriguing clue. Snowden was identified to him, according to Putin, not by name but merely as an "agent of special services." Putin's description suggests the meeting had taken place before Snowden became a household name on June 9, 2013.

For his part, Snowden was evasive when discussing his contacts with Russia while still in Hong Kong. When Lana Lam asked Snowden on June 12, 2013 whether he had already requested asylum from the Russia government, he deferred, saying: "My only comment is that I am glad there are governments that refuse to be intimidated by great power." As it turned out, Snowden was correct. The Russian government was not intimidated by the threats of reprisals by the United States, as the Obama Administration would learn after his arrival in Russia on June 23, 2013. But the only way that Snowden could not have known that fact on June 12th was by being in contact with Russian officials prior to his interview with Lam. Of course, he may have had multiple contacts on different dates with these officials. The Russian pro-government newspaper *Kommersant* reported that Snowden had visited the Russian consulate on more than one occasion and had been given a birthday celebration there on June 21, 2013.

What we do know about Snowden's interactions with the Russians in Hong Kong comes partly from Putin's own description of them. Putin said, it will be recalled, that his decision to facilitate Snowden's escape to Russia had been kicked all the way up the Russian chain of command for him to personally decide Snowden's fate. Presumably, this decision-making process began earlier than June 21, 2013, when he reportedly came to the consulate. The question is: how much earlier? Since Snowden had arrived in Hong Kong on May 20th, 2013, his contacts with Russian officials could have occurred as long as a month earlier. That would fit in with Snowden telling Gellman on May 24th that he needed his help in dealing with the diplomatic mission of an unnamed country. In any case, Putin tells us he learned an American "agent of the special services" had contacted Russian diplomats because he wanted assistance. And Snowden did need assistance to escape from Hong Kong. As he had no visas, he would require the sort of assistance that could only be provided by a government willing to defy the United States. The assistance came from Russia.

Nine days before Snowden boarded Aeroflot flight SU213 to Moscow on June 23rd, the US had filed a criminal complaint against him. It had also alerted Hong Kong authorities and Interpol when it unsealed the complaint on June 21, 2013. And on June 21st it had invalidated his U.S. passport (although he still had it in his possession at the Hong Kong Airport.) Since by this time he was the most famous visitor in Hong Kong, his passage through passport control may have reflected the acquiescence of the Hong Kong authorities to the reported request of China to be rid of Snowden by June 23rd. All we know for certain is that Hong Kong airport police did not stop Snowden.

He was allowed on the Aeroflot flight at Hong Kong International Airport. Aeroflot, a state-owned airline, presumably responds to the Russian government when matters of state security are concerned. According to one Aeroflot official, ordinarily all international passengers are required to have a valid passport as well as a visa to the country of final destination. Snowden had neither a valid passport nor a visa. These boarding requirements were waived so that Snowden was able to board the flight to Moscow.

Snowden only met Harrison in person on June 23rd, the day he was to depart Hong Kong. She was waiting for him in the private car that Jonathan Mann had arranged to take him to the airport that morning. Snowden was dressed in a grey shirt and khaki slacks. Harrison was also casually dressed in jeans and flip-flops. She said she chosen this dress style so that they would blend in at the airport with vacationing tourists. As she had financed the trip, she was apparently now calling the shots. Harrison's concern was that they might be arrested at the airport, so Mann accompanied them through passport control. He was able to do this because he bought a ticker on a cheap international flight. Harrison also gave Mann a phone number to call if they got arrested. When they finally boarded the flight at 12:45 pm, Harrison effectively became Snowden's second "carer"—a job that would require her presence in Moscow for the next four months.

Once the plane took off, Snowden, who had only said a few words in the car, said to her, as she recalled, the first full sentence she had heard from him. It was "I didn't expect that WikiLeaks was going to send a ninja to get me out."

Meanwhile, Assange continued creating "distractions," as he put it. On June 24th, a booking was made for Snowden on the Aeroflot flight to Cuba, and this information was relayed to the foreign press organization in Moscow, resulting on over a dozen reporters buying tickets on the flight. But Snowden never showed up for the flight. This ruse resulted in these foreign correspondents flying to Havana. "In some of our communications, we deliberately spoke about that [flight] on open lines to lawyers in the United States," Assange said. One subsequent piece of his misinformation was that Snowden was flying to Bolivia on the private plane of Bolivian President Evo Morales (who was then in Moscow for a meeting.) That misinformation had the desired effect. US allies in Europe, including France, Spain and Portugal refused to allow that plane to fly through its airspace, forcing the plane to land in Austria. This Assange-inspired distraction caused an international incident but did not change the fact that Snowden was in the custody of Russia.

Snowden himself came to realize that those assisting him, including Assange and Harrison, were taking serious risks. "Anyone in a three-mile radius [of me] is going to get hammered," he later explained to a reported from *Vogue*. (After finally leaving Snowden in Moscow on November 3, 2013, Harrison moved to Berlin, where she set up an organization to provide, as she termed it, "an underground railroad" for other fugitives who have provided documents exposing government secrets.)

Snowden meanwhile received sanctuary in Russia. His public statements in Hong Kong that he was willing to go prison so that others could live freely in a democratic society were, as it turned out, mere rhetoric. Instead of risking prison, he had successfully escaped to a country in which he would be treated as a hero for defying the US government. He had not sacrificed himself, he had transformed himself. He had risen from being a lowly technician in Hawaii whose talents went largely unrecognized, to the status of an international media star in Moscow. In his new messianic role, he could make Internet appearances via Skype to prestigious gathering such as the TED conference where he would be roundly applauded as an Internet hero. He could be beamed into dozens of ACLU meetings where he would be celebrated as a defender of American liberty. He could describe to sympathetic audiences in Germany, Norway and France the unfairness of the American legal system, asserting that it was denting him a "far trial." He could now make front page news by granting interview to the *New York Times, Washington Post, Nation* and other elite newspapers. He could join Poitras and Greenwald on the Board of Directors of the Freedom of the Press Foundation. He could be the subject of both an Oscar-winning documentary, the hero of the 2016 Hollywood movie "Snowden." directed by Oliver Stone and a consultant to the 2015 season of the television series "Homeland." He could also be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. His could also attract over one-half million followers to his tweets on Twitter in 2015. "For me, in terms of personal satisfaction, the mission's already accomplished. I already won," he informed the *Washington Post* in his first live interview in Moscow. It was a mission that involved a very high stakes enterprise: taking America's state secrets abroad.

How he managed to succeed in this extraordinary undertaking is another story and one which may not lend itself to an innocent explanation. Whistle-blowers do not ordinarily steal military secrets. Nor do they flee to the territory of America's principle adversaries. A fugitive, especially one lacking a Russian visa, does not wind up in Moscow by pure accident. A Russian President, especially one with the KGB background of Putin, does not lightly give his personal sanction to a high-profile exfiltration from Hong Kong without weighing the gain that might proceed from it. Part of that calculus would be that the defector had taken possession of a great number of classified documents from the inner sanctum of the NSA. To be sure, the practical value of this stolen archive would require a lengthily evaluation by its intelligence services. Finally, a defector who put himself in the palm of the hand of the FSB in Moscow would be expected to cooperate with it. Even if such a defector did not carry these files with him to Moscow, intelligence services have the means to recover digital files, even if after they are erased from a computer or if they are sent to the cloud. Once secret documents are taken, they are compromised. How Snowden succeeded in this coup cannot simply be pieced together from his statements and interviews. The story also requires a visit to the wilderness of mirrors called counterintelligence.

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PART THREE

THE COUNTERINTELLIGENCE CONUNDRUM

"Scenarios deal with two worlds: the world of facts and the world of perceptions. They explore for facts but they aim at perceptions inside the heads of decision makers. Their purpose is to gather and transform information of strategic significance into fresh perceptions"

—Pierre Wack, Harvard Business Review, 1985

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Did Snowden Act Alone?

"When you look at the totality of Snowden's actions certainly one hypothesis that jumps out at you, that seems to explain his ability to do all these things, is that he had help and had help from somebody who was very competent in these matters."

--General Michael Hayden, Former Director of the NSA and CIA

Snowden describes himself a whistle-blower, and, according to the polls, the vast majority of the American public, accept this definition of him. But the operational distinction between a whistle-blower and a spy is not always clear. A whistle-blower enters the enterprise of stealing state secrets for reasons of conscience, but so do many spies. Such conscience-driven spies are called, in CIA parlance, "ideological agents." For instance, the British diplomat Donald Maclean, who was one of the most important Russian spies in the Cold War, was an ideological recruit. Maclean stole immensely valuable US nuclear secrets for the Russian intelligence service without receiving any monetary compensation and later defected to Moscow to avoid arrest.

As it turns out, the acceptance of money is also necessarily a meaningful distinction when it comes to espionage. To be sure, many spies get paid, but some whistle-blowers also receive paid a rich bounty for their work. Indeed, under federal laws, whistle-blowers can qualify for multi-million dollars bounties for exposing financial malfeasance. The whistle blower Bradley Birkenfeld, for example, after he himself was paroled from prison in 2012, received an award of $104 million for providing data that exposed illicit tax sheltering at the Swiss UBS bank. Assange also offered political whistle-blower six-figure cash bounties from money he raises on the Internet. In 2015, for instance Wikileaks offered S100, 000 bounties to any whistle-blowers who provided the site with secret documents exposing details of the Pacific Trade Agreement.

Nor is acting alone necessarily a line that divides whistle blowers from spies. In many cases, whistle-blowers have accomplices that help them carry out their mission. For example, in 1969, the celebrated whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg, a military analyst at the RAND Corporation, had an accomplice, Anthony Russo, who also had worked at RAND. (Both were indicted by the government.) Acting in concert, they copied secret documents that became famously known as the Pentagon Papers.

Whistle-blowers also can, like conventional spies, enter into elaborate conspiracies to carry out a penetration operation, For example, on the night of March 8, 1971, eight whistle-blowers working together with burglary tools, broke into the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, and stole almost all the FBI files there. The conspirators escaped and kept their identities secret for over 42 years.

Self-definitions also do necessarily produce a distinction between whistle-blowers and conventional spies. Consider, for example Philip Agee. Agee left the CIA in 1969 for what he described "reasons of conscience." Specifically, he said he objected to the CIA's covert support of Latin America dictators. After contacting the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City, he defected to Cuba, where he leaked information that exposed CIA operations. Although Agee insisted he was a whistle-blower, and he adamantly denied offering any secrets to the Soviet Union, the KGB viewed him as a conventional spy. According to Oleg Kalugin, the top Soviet counterintelligence officer in the KGB in Moscow, who defected to the U.S., Agee offered CIA secrets first to the KGB residency in Mexico City in 1973 and then to Cuban intelligence service. Agee provided the KGB with a "treasure trove" of US secrets, Kalugin revealed. "I then sat in my office in Moscow reading the growing list of revelations coming from Agee." Despite this disparity, Agee still defined himself to the public as a whistle-blower because he also had exposed CIA operations to the public.

The Snowden case blurs the demarcation line even further. Unlike other whistle-blowers who uncovered what they considered government malfeasance by virtue of their job, Snowden, by his own admission, took a new job in 2013 specifically to get access to the SCI files concerning NSA sources that he stole from the Threat Operations Center. Switching jobs in order to widen one's access to state secrets us an activity usually associated with penetration agents, not whistle-blowers. While the technical distinction between a whistle-blower and a spy may still serve the media in the case of Snowden, it does not help in solving the counterintelligence conundrum.

Untangling the strands of the Snowden conundrum is no easy matter. A complex burglary of state secrets had been successfully carried in a supposedly-secure site. The only known witness, Snowden, had escaped to Russia, where he could be of help in reconstructing the crime. The stolen data was kept in the equivalent of sealed "vaults"—which were actually computer drives that were not connected to the NSA Network ever there was a locked room mystery, this was it.

The perpetrator Snowden pierced these barriers by using passwords that belonged to other people and using credentials that allowed him to masquerade as a system administrator. However it was carried out, it was feat required meticulous planning. As in the earlier example of a hypothetical diamond theft from locked vaults, what is needed is to explain how a perpetrator, who did not himself have the combinations to open them or the means to remove their content, succeeded in the theft.

To address such a mystery, a counterintelligence investigation starts with a tabula rasa, stripping away all the previous assumptions, including that Snowden was the lone perpetrator. Once back at square one, it builds alternative scenarios to test against the known facts. To be sure, scenario-building differs from that of a conventional forensic investigation aimed at finding pieces of evidence that can be used to persuade a jury in a courtroom. Unlike a judicial investigation concerned with guilt and innocence, scenario-building looks building looks to develop a story that is, concurrently: intrinsically consistent, humanly plausible and symbolically memorable; and in the process, it also identifies and explores the possible holes in the case. Such scenarios must aim at constituting a limited set of alternatives that are mutually exclusive The point is to assure that any alternative that fits the relevant facts, no matter how implausible it initially may seem to be, is not neglected.

One of the most vexing problems that had to be explained by these scenarios is how Snowden got the passwords to up to 24 of these vaults. He could not have obtained these passwords during his previous employment at Dell because Dell technicians did not have access to the Level 3 documents stored in these compartments. Nor, as was discussed earlier, was he given access to them when he transferred to Booz Allen because he had not completed the requisite training.

Snowden had also, it will be recalled, relinquished his privileges as a system administrator when he transferred to Booz Allen, so he did not have the privilege to override password protection. In short, his new position as an infrastructure analyst did not give him the ability to enter compartments which he had not yet been read into.

There are two possible ways he could have gotten these passwords: Either he had assistance from a party who had access to them or he found flaws in the NSA's security procedures that left the supposedly-closed vaults effectively unlocked.

The Unwitting Accomplice Possibility

As for the first alternative, it is possible whatever assistance that Snowden received was entirely unwitting. For example, he could have simply asked other analysts at the Center who had been "read into" compartments for their passwords. But such an approach would be extremely risky for him. If an analyst gave him his password, and it was discovered, that analyst could lose his job. Moreover, any analyst was supposed to report any request for a password to a security officer. Nor was Snowden, who had been working at the Threat Operations Center for just a few weeks as a trainee, well known to other analysts. So asking them to break the rules was fairly risky for Snowden. "It is inconceivable to me that his co-workers would divulge their passwords to him," a former Booz Allen executive, who had also worked at the Defense Intelligence Agency, told me. "If he was a system administrator he might trick a threat analyst into entering his password into his computer under the pretext that he needed it to deal with an urgent hardware issue." But Snowden was not a system administrator at the Center. Snowden therefore "had no plausible reason for requesting passwords to compartment he had not been read into," the former executive said. I asked him what the chance was of him obtaining some 24 passwords in 5 weeks. "In my opinion, near zero," he said. I next asked him whether it was possible that Snowden could have used a device for intercepting another computer's electronic signals, called by hackers a "key logger." Such a device, which was obtainable over the Internet, could be used to steal passwords of the analysts who had been "read into" the compartments. My source said that while it was possible that Snowden smuggled in a key logger in his backpack, it could not be operated wirelessly inside the Center because, like all other NSA facilities, the computers had been insulated to lock-out wireless transmission. This precaution was taken to guard against an EMP, or Electro-Magnetic Pulse, attack by an enemy. If so, the only way Snowden could intercept key strokes was to attach a cable from his key logger to each of his fellow workers' computers. In this scenario, he would have to surreptitiously build his own wired network connecting his hidden key logger to 24 separated computers. Moreover, he would have to do this wiring in an open-plan office where he could not count on these additional wires, even if rigged one by one, not being noticed by either other analysts on the room or the geek squad of system administrators who regularly checked connections. Making the task even more risky, according to my Booz Allen source, there were closed-circuit cameras. The only way he could mitigate the risk of detection was by having someone help him build this network.

There was a further security barrier he had to get by. Even after he managed to obtain all the necessary passwords from colleagues, he had to transfer the files to an external storage device. This was not a matter of simply using a thumb drive because, unlike in caper movies such as *Mission Impossible*, the ports on the computers at the NSA were ordinarily sealed shut. This measure was done specifically to prevent any unauthorized downloading by NSA workers. The only people at the Center who had the authorization, and the means, to open these ports and transfer data were system administrators, according to the former Booz Allen executive. System administrators needed to have this privilege to deal with glitches in the computers. So they were allowed to open up the sealed ports. But Snowden was no longer a system administrator and did not have these privileges. So again, he needed some help. He either would need to borrow another system administrator's credential or forge his own. The credential he would need is called a public key infrastructure card with its authentication code embedded in a magnetic stripe. When I asked the former Booz Allen executive if Snowden possessed the skill set to forge such a card, he said that he strongly doubted any NSA employee would be capable of such a forgery without special equipment. He could have, however, borrowed this credential from a system administrator who was willing to help him. But just asking such a favor could "set off alarms."

The unwitting accomplice scenario had another stumbling block: time. We know from Poitras that Snowden told her in early April 2013 that he planned to deliver documents to her in six to eight weeks (which he in fact did.) But he had not yet started working for Booz Allen at the Center until that same month. It does not seem plausible (to me) that in making such a commitment he was merely counting on the kindness of strangers to fulfill it The only way he could have known for certain that he would be able to borrow a public key infrastructure card and obtain the passwords, whether by trickery or by a key router, before he had begun working at the Center was that he already knew someone at the Center who would help him. But such a contact leads to a witting accomplice scenario.

The Witting Accomplice Possibility

The witting-accomplice scenario better fits with the principle in logic called Occam's razor that suggests that in choosing between alternative explanations, the one that requires the fewest assumptions should be given priority. It would be a relatively easy to gain access to passwords if Snowden had the cooperation of an insider at the center that had been read into the compartments or, even better, if he had the cooperation with a system administrator with the necessary PKI cards and shell keys to bypass the password protection. Such an accomplice could also help explain how Snowden was able to get the job at the Center in the first place; how he knew in advance that he could find there the "lists" of the NSA sources in foreign countries, and how he knew that there were no security traps at the center. Such a witting accomplice might even have prepared in advance the "spiders" that Snowden used to index the files.

The witting-accomplice scenario of course requires a somewhat unsettling expansion of the plot. It means Snowden collaborated with one or more insiders at the Center to steal secret documents. It is not difficult to imagine, in light of the lax background checks at outside contractors servicing the NSA, that there were others in the "geek squad" that shared Snowden's antipathy to NSA surveillance. Certainly, we know that Snowden found other NSA workers who were willing to attend his anti-surveillance Crypto party in December 2012. Anyone of these other potential dissidents could have shared Snowden's objective of exposing NSA abuses. It would only be a small next step to offer Snowden help if he was willing to go public. Indeed, if the geek culture produced one Snowden, why wouldn't it produce others? If such an accomplice lacked Snowden's willingness to flee to another country, he may have limited his participation to supplying technical assistance. For his part, Snowden may have agreed to divert suspicion from his accomplice by taking sole responsibility for the crime when he went public.

The problem with this scenario, however, is that no witting accomplices were ever found. The FBI, which was in charge of the domestic part of investigation of the Snowden case, questioned all of Snowden's co-workers at the Center over the course of six months but it failed to find anyone who knowingly helped Snowden. If the accomplice was an idealistic amateur, it is likely the FBI would have found him. Three co-workers did admit to the FBI that they might have inadvertently given Snowden their passwords but these three slips would not account for Snowden's breach of all the other compartments. Of course, there may have also been less forthcoming co-workers hid their slips in divulging their passwords to Snowden.

This raises the more sinister possibility that the accomplice was not an amateur co-worker but a deep-cover spy who was already in place when Snowden arrived on the scene. Such a penetration agent could have been recruited by an adversary intelligence service before Snowden came on the scene. After Snowden expressed a desire to expose the NSA's domestic surveillance, it could then have used Snowden as an "umbrella" to hide its own activities. Finding such a means to protect a source while exploiting his or her information is not uncommon in espionage operations, and since Snowden was willing to flee America and go public, he could serve as a near perfect umbrella. "Snowden may have carried out of the NSA many more documents than he knew about," a former CIA station chief speculated. It could also account for the disparity between the claims of Snowden and the NSA damage assessment as to the number of the documents that were compromised.

As farfetched as this mole scenario may seem to the outside world, less than three years before the Snowden breach, the NSA had received a warning from a CIA mole, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 21, that the Russian Intelligence service might have recruited a KGB mole at the Fort Meade headquarters of the NSA. No mole was found in 2010, and, if one existed, it could not have been Snowden, who at that time in 2010 was working for the NSA in Japan. Such a putative mole conceivably could have acquired enough information to later facilitate Snowden's operation.

In this scenario, Snowden would not be difficult to spot as a potential collaborator and possible umbrella. As Snowden acknowledges, he was not a happy worker at the NSA. He complained between 2010 and 2013 about what he considered NSA abuses to coworkers, superiors and in his posts over the Internet. If someone assumed the guise of a reluctant whistle-blower, he would have little difficulty in approaching Snowden. Snowden might not even know his true affiliation beyond that he shared Snowden's anti-surveillance views. If Snowden then voiced an interest in exposing the NSA's secrets, this person could supply him with the necessary guidance, steering a still unsuspecting Snowden first to the Booz Allen position and afterwards to his associates in Hong Kong. By taking sole credit for the coup in the video that he made with Poitras and Greenwald in Hong Kong, he acted, as he told Greenwald, to divert suspicion from anyone else. This move could also any collaborator he may have had in Hawaii time to cover his tracks.

The astronomer Carl Sagan famously said in regard to searching the universe for signals from other civilizations that the "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." That injunction also applies to the spooky universe of espionage. The fact that a mole hunt fails to find a hidden collaborator at the NSA does not necessarily mean such a mole does not exist. Historically, we have many notable cases in which Russian moles eluded intensive investigations for many decades. Robert Hanssen served as a KGB penetration in the FBI for over 20 years without being caught. Similarly, Aldrich Ames, acted as a KGB mole in the CIA for more than ten years, and passed all the CIA's sophisticated lie detector tests. Both Hanssen and Ames eluded intensive FBI and CIA investigations that lasted over a decade. According to Victor Cherkashin, their KGB case officer, who I interviewed in Moscow in 2015, the KGB was able to hide their existence from investigators for such a long period partly because of the widespread belief in U.S. intelligence that moles were fictional creatures that sprung from the "paranoid mind" of James Jesus Angleton. When I then cited the signature line from the movie *The Usual Suspects* "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." Cherkashin thinly smiled and said "CIA denial [of moles] certainly helped."

In view of such past successes of the Russian intelligence services, it cannot be precluded that there was another person in the NSA working with Snowden who used an enthusiastic as cover to prevent any light from falling on his own surreptitious spying. While it may seem extremely unlikely that Snowden had such assistance, the alternative scenario, that Snowden broke into the sealed compartments and made off with the documents without any assistance, seems equally unlikely.

Even if Snowden had been, as he claims, a pure idealist seeking to right a perceived wrong, it does exclude the possibility of his becoming entangled in the plots of others. Intelligence services make it their business to bring about such witting or unwitting entanglements.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Question of When?

“The NSA was actually concerned back in the time of the crypto-wars with improving American security. Nowadays, we see that their priority is weakening our security”

—Snowden in Moscow

In his 1974 novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, John LeCarre helped establish the concept in the public imagination of a mole burrowing unto a rival intelligence service. LeCarre’s now classic mole, code-named by the KGB “Gerald,” managed in the novel to gain access to the inner sanctum of the British intelligence service MI-6. Aided and guided by his controllers in Moscow, he systematically stole British intelligence secrets. As LeCarre wove the plot, the brilliantly-orchestrated operation involved spotting, compromising, and recruiting others to gradually advance Gerald the mole to a position of power. Such well-organized penetrations are not limited to fiction. The career of KGB mole Heinz Felfe, who was advanced through the ranks of German intelligence by an elaborate series of sacrifices by his controllers in Moscow until he actually headed German counterintelligence in 1961, could have served as the non-fiction inspiration for Le Carre’s 1963 novel *The Spy Who Came out of the Cold.* As US intelligence only found out after the Cold War ended, the KGB also had the ability to sustain moles for decades.

The CIA also had its share of long term successes, such as Alexander Poteyev, who fed the CIA secrets for over ten years while burrowing into Russian intelligence. In the choreography of these operations, as in Le Carre’s fiction, rival intelligence services ensnared and sacrificed recruits , as if playing a chess game, to advance their moles. Despite notable successes such as Felfe, and Poteyev, a great number of these elaborate conspiracies fail insinuate moles in their adversaries’ confidence. Intelligence services therefore also take advantage of a more prosaic source: the self-generated spy, or, as they are called in the trade, walk-in.

Although they are largely unsung in novels, these walk-ins are an important part of espionage. A counterespionage review done for the Presidential Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIEB) in 1990 found that most US spies in the Cold War had taken documents on their own volition and only afterwards offered them to an adversary service. Self-generated spies have diverse motives. Some intelligence workers steal secrets for financial gains. Others take them to further an ideological interest. As opportunistic enterprises, intelligence services do not turn walk-ins away if they have valuable intelligence. Indeed, some of the most successful moles were not recruited, or even controlled, by spy agencies. They were self-generated penetrations, or “sources” as the KGB preferred to call them, who first stole secrets and later voluntarily deliver them to an adversary. Consider the case of Robert Hanssen, who successfully penetrated the FBI for the Russian intelligence services from 1979 to 2001. He was a "walk-in," who never entered the Soviet embassy or met with KGB or SVR case officers. Instead, he set his espionage in motion by passing an anonymous letter to Victor Cherkashin, the KGB spy handler working undercover at the Soviet Embassy in Washington D.C. From the start of his work for the KGB, Hanssen laid down his own rules. The KGB would deliver cash from which all the fingerprints were removed to locations, or "dead drops," he specified. He would deliver documents exposing FBI, CIA and NSA sources and methods in another dead drop. The KGB would precisely follow his instructions. Cherkashin told me that Hanssen's "astounding self-recruitment" was executed in such a way that the KGB never actually controlled him. "He was our most important mole and we didn't ever know his identity, where he worked or how he had access to FBI, CIA and NSA files." Even so, the KGB (and later SVR) paid him $600,000 in cash. In return, the anonymous spy delivered 27 computer discs containing hundreds of secret documents revealing the sources and methods of American intelligence. According to Cherkashin, it was the largest haul of top secrets documents ever obtained by the KGB (although it was only a small fraction of the number of top secret NSA, Department of Defense and CIA documents taken by Snowden in 2013.) Cherkashin told me the price paid by Moscow was a great bargain since it helped compromise "the NSA's most advanced electronic interception technology," including a tunnel under the Soviet Embassy. Yet, it was only after newspapers reported that Hanssen had been arrested by the FBI in February 2001 that Cherkashin learned the name and position of the spy that he had recruited. Cherkashin told me that what matters to the KGB was not "control" of an agent but the value of the secrets he or she delivered. "Control is not necessary in espionage as long as we manage to obtain the documents." So in the eyes of the KGB, anyone who elects to provide it with US secrets is a spy.

It is also possible to exploit a walk-in even after he has left his service. For example, KGB Major Anatoli Golitsyn was an ideological self-generated spy who walked into the US embassy in Helsinki, Finland on Christmas Day 1962. He asked to see the CIA officer on duty announce to him he had collected a trove of KGB secrets, including information that could identify its key spies in the West. He offered to defect to the U.S. The CIA accepted his offer, and through this archive of secrets he had previously compiled, he became one of the CIA's most productive sources in the Cold War.

The job of an intelligence service is to take advantage of whatever opportunities comes its way in the form of self-generated spies. If a Russian walk-in had not yet burned his bridges to his own service, US intelligence officers were under instructions to attempt to persuade the walk-in to return to his post in Russia and serve as a "defector-in-place," or mole. "While defectors can and do provide critical information, a CIA memorandum on walk-ins during the Cold War noted, "There are very few cases in which the same individual may not have been of greater value if he had returned to his post." Of course if a walk-in believed he was already compromises, as Golitsyn did, a decision would have to be made whether the value of his intelligence merited exfiltrating him to the United States.

This required evaluating the bona fides of the walk-in. Not all walk-ins are accepted as defectors. Some walk-ins are deemed "dangles," or agents dispatched by the KGB to test and confuse the CIA. Others are rejected as political liabilities, as happened to Wang Lijun, a well-connected police chief in China. In February 2012, Wang, walked into at the US consulate in Chengdu asking from asylum. The State Department decided against it. After Wang left US protection, he was arrested for corruption and received a 15 year prison sentence. Such decisions about walk-ins are not made with due consideration, often at the highest level of a government, since exfiltrating a defector can result in diplomatic ruptures and political embarrassments.

Conversely, it raises espionage concerns when an adversary government authorizes the exfiltration of a rogue employee of an intelligence service. At minimum, it means that a rival government placed value on what the defector could provide it. The Snowden case is no exception. Whatever Snowden's prior relations may have been with Russia, it could prudently assumed that after he fled to Moscow, in light of the intelligence value of the stolen documents, he would wind up in the hands of the Russian security services. That assumption was reinforced by subsequent countermeasures that were implemented by Russia to block secret sources of NSA surveillance. "Within weeks of the [Snowden] leaks, communications sources dried up, tactics were changed," Michael Morell who was at that time the Deputy Director of the CIA, revealed. It indicated that at least part of the US communications intelligence that Snowden had stole was in enemy hands. The CIA and NSA's monitoring of these countermeasures was itself extremely delicate since revealing what they learned about Russian and Chinese countermeasures risked compromising even more U.S communications sources than had Snowden. General Keith B. Alexander headed both the NSA and Cyber Command at the time these countermeasures were first detected in 2013. He said in his interview with the *Australian Business Review*: "We absolutely need to know what Russia's involvement is with Snowden." He further said, "I think Snowden is now being manipulated by Russian intelligence. I just don't know when that exactly started." Much turned on the answer to this "when" question. The counterintelligence issue was not if this U.S. intelligence defector in Moscow was under Russian control, but when he came under it.

There were three possible time periods when Snowden might have been brought under control by the Russian intelligence service: while he was still working for the NSA; after he arrived in Hong Kong on May 20, 2013; or after he arrived in Russia on June 23, 2013.

The NSA Scenario

The first scenario could stretch as far back as when Snowden was forced out of the CIA in 2009. It will be recalled that the CIA then had planned to launch a security investigation of Snowden but it was aborted when he resigned. He also had incurred large losses speculating in the financial markets in Geneva, which is an activity which had in the past attracted in interest of foreign intelligence services. So it had to be considered in this scenario that Snowden had been recruited by the Russians after he left the CIA and directed to take jobs at civilian contractors servicing the NSA. Such "career management," as it is called by the CIA, could explain why Snowden had switched jobs in March 2013 to Booz Allen Hamilton, which, unlike his previous employer Dell, allowed him to gain proximity the super-secrets list of the telecommunication systems that the NSA had penetrated in Russia and China. Even though Snowden himself did not have password access to these files, since he was still as a trainee, he managed to acquire the necessary passwords from others working there. It could also account for why the documents he copied that pertained to NSA operations in Russia were not among those he gave to Poitras, Greenwald and other journalists. Since Russia has an active intelligence sharing treaty with China since 1996, it could further explain why his first stop was Hong Kong, a part of China. It was a safe venue for debriefing Snowden, as well as establishing his credentials among journalists as a whistle-blower, before a decision was made to allow him to proceed to Russia.

The nearly fatal problem with this early-recruitment scenario is Snowden contacts with journalists. Snowden, it will be recalled, had contacted Greenwald in December 2012. Greenwald was a high-profile blogger in Brazil who did not use encryption or any security safeguards. Next, he contacted Poitras in January 2013 in Berlin who was a magnet for NSA dissidents. Both of these contacts put Snowden's clandestine downloading at grave risk. As known opponents of US intelligence agencies, these journalists might be, as they themselves suspected they were, under surveillance by American, British, Brazilian or German intelligence services. Greenwald and Poitras might also tell others who were either under surveillance or informers. So no matter what precaution Snowden took, his secret enterprise, or just the fact he was in contact with anti-government activists might be detected. At minimum, he could lose his access to secrets and be of no further use as a source at the NSA. He could also be interrogated and reveal the way he was brought under control. If Snowden actually had been under the control of the Russian intelligence service, the last thing it would allow was for him to take such a risk—or even to contact a single journalist. After all, the purpose of an espionage operation is to steal secrets without alerting anyone, including journalists, to the theft. A former CIA officer told me that while anything could "go haywire: in an intelligence operation, it would be "unthinkable" that the Russian intelligence service would permit a source it controlled in the NSA to expose himself by contacting journalists. It was, as he put it, a "lose-lose move." Assuming that the operation did not "go haywire," Snowden's continued interactions with Poitras and Greenwald made it implausible to me that Snowden was under Russian control *before* he went to Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Scenario

The second possibility is that Snowden was brought under Russian control while he was in Hong Kong. The most compelling support for this scenario comes from Putin himself, His disclosure about the case leaves little doubt that Russian officials engaged Snowden in Hong Kong, that Putin authorized his trip to Moscow while he was in Hong Kong and the Russian government allowed him to fly to Moscow without a Russian visa. We also know that Snowden indicated to Gellman he was in touch with a foreign embassy and that he met with Russian diplomats in Hong Kong. We know from US surveillance of his activities in Hong Kong that he contacted the Russian consulate. And we know that the Russians went to some lengths to facilitate his trip to Moscow. All these pieces in the Hong Kong scenario support the possibility that the Russian intelligence service managed to bring him under its sway during his 33 days in Hong Kong.

The Russian intelligence service even might have been aware of Snowden, and his anti-NSA activities, before his arrival on May 20, 2013. Snowden, as discussed earlier, was anything but discrete in his contacts with strangers in the anti-surveillance movement, including such well known activists as Runa Sandvik (who he supplied his true name and address via email), Micah Lee, Jacob Appelbaum, Parker Higgins, and Laura Poitras. “It is not statistically improbable that members of this circle were being watched by a hostile service,” a former NSA counterintelligence officer told me in 2015. When I told him that Poitras and others in her circle had used PGP encryption, aliases and TOR software in their exchanges with Snowden, he said, arching his eyebrows, “That might work against amateurs, but it wouldn’t stop the Russians if they thought they might have a defector in the NSA.” He explained that both the NSA and hostile services have the “means” to bypass such safeguards.

I next asked him what the Russian intelligence service would have done if they had indeed spotted Snowden in late 2012 or early 2013. “Maybe just research him,” he replied. As we know now, he pointed out. Russia and China probably had access the 127-page standard form in his personnel file that he updated in 2011. They also had the capability to track his air travel to Hong Kong. “Could someone have steered him to Hong Kong?” I asked. He answered. With a shrug, “That depends on whether Snowden had a confidante who could have influenced him.”

Whenever adversaries became aware of Snowden in this scenario, it was not until after Snowden copied the NSA secrets and took them with him to Hong Kong that Russian intelligence officers offered him a deal. So from the Russian point of view, Snowden had already burnt his bridges. Since he had used other people’s passwords to get into computers that he was not authorized to use, illegally moved documents and gave a false reason for his medical leave, it was only a matter of time before NSA investigators would identify him as a possible spy. He could be of no further use to an adversary at the NSA. His intelligence value now lay in the documents he had taken with him or stored in the cloud as well as his ability to help clarify them in debriefing sessions. In addition, he could have a further use to an adversary, especially if he agreed to cooperate. By virtue of his position as a former insider, he could inflict damage on the morale and public standing of the NSA by denouncing its spying in the media. So once in Hong Kong, the Russians would have no reason to restrain him from holding a press event or releasing a video, In fact, in the past the KGB had organized press conferences for all the previous NSA defectors to Moscow. Hong Kong also might be seen as a perfect venue for a well-staged media event since all the major newspapers in the world had bureaus there. And his disclosures about the NSA spying coming under the mantle of whistle-blowing could serve to weaken the NSA’s relations with its allies. The event would also serve to deflect suspicion from any other potential spies in the NSA, if any existed. Snowden’s going public on June 9th 2013 provided that opportunity.

It is also possible in this Hong Kong scenario that Russian or Chinese intelligence did not become aware of Snowden until after he went public on June 9th 2013 by having the *Guardian* release his video. At that point, if the Russians or Chinese had any doubts how dissatisfied he was with the NSA, they would be dispelled by the video. Since dissatisfaction is one of the classic means of recruitment in the intelligence business, he certainly would become a prime target for recruitment after he went public. The CIA also considered the possibility that Snowden also may have been reeled in unwittingly. Its Deputy Director, Michael Morell suggested in his book that Snowden may not himself have fully realized "when and how he would be used."

What can be safely assumed is that the decision made by Putin's intelligence service to allow Snowden to proceed to Russia proceeded from something other than soft-hearted sentiment about his welfare. In addition, this decision was not made on the spur of the moment. After Putin learned that there was an American in Hong Kong from the "special services" seeking to come to Russia, he also learned from Snowden's own disclosure on the video that he had taken to Hong Kong a large number of NSA documents. After that self-outing by Snowden, Putin had at least 14 days to calculate the advantages and disadvantages of allowing him to come to Moscow. To be sure, we don't know the precise date of Snowden's first contact with Russian officials in Hong Kong. Putin reframed from specifying when Snowden first met them. But whenever it was, we know that he was deemed important enough by the Russian intelligence service for it to bring him to the personal attention of Putin.

Putin could offer him not only his freedom from arrest but a platform to express his views. The exploitation of an intelligence defector, even after he yields his secrets documents, can also be part of an intelligence operation. General Alexander, who ran the NSA during this period, concluded that Putin was playing a deep game with Snowden by "looking to capitalize on the fact that his [Snowden's] actions are enormously disruptive and damaging to US interests." This game, if Alexander's assessment in correct, might provide Putin with ample reason to have his representatives in Hong Kong offer Snowden an exfiltration deal.

Snowden hardly was not in any position to refuse such a deal. After the release of the video release, there was no going back to America without his facing a determined criminal prosecution. If he had researched the issue, he would have known that in every prior case, intelligence workers who had released even a single classified document had gone to prison. As his Internet postings show, he had closely followed the ordeal of Bradley Manning, whose trial was coming to its conclusion while Snowden was in Hong Kong. So he likely knew that even though the documents Manning had sent to Wikileaks were far less damaging than those Snowden had taken. Manning had been kept in solitary confinement under horrific conditions for over a year while awaiting his trial and was facing a long prison sentence. (Manning was subsequently sentenced to 35 years in prison.) There was no reason for Snowden to expect a better outcome for himself if he returned to the US or was arrested in Hong Kong or any other place that had an extradition treaty with the US. As the Russian officials in Hong Kong might well have informed him, Russia had no extradition treaty with the US, It was also one of the few places in the world that he could reach from Hong Kong without flying through airspace in which he might be intercepted by a US ally. Moreover, Putin himself had approved his exfiltration, which meant that, even without a valid passport or visa, Snowden could take the direct Aeroflot flight to Moscow. Snowden's choice was going to Russia or going to prison.

The Russians could have used this leverage in the Hong Kong scenario to extract a *quid pro quo.* The price of admission in that *quid pro quo* was proving all his documents and putting himself in the hands of Russian intelligence. To be sure, Snowden might have refused this leverage in Hong Kong, and Putin may have decided the terms of the deal could better be negotiated in Moscow.

The Moscow Scenario

The final possibility is that Snowden did not come under Russian control until after he arrived in Moscow. Certainly, the Russian intelligence service could afford to wait in Hong Kong before tightening the vice on Snowden. It knew that Interpol and the US would be pursuing him throughout the world and that Snowden had no valid travel documents to go anywhere else. It could also have determined that his credit cards had been frozen. So it could afford to wait until his plane landed in Russia.

After the Russians took him in a "special operation" from the plane at the airport, he was informed by Russian authorities that he would not be allowed to go to Cuba, Venezuela, Iceland, Ecuador, or any other country without the permission of Russian officials, which would not be immediately forthcoming. So he never even showed up for the flight to Cuba (which Assange had "leaked" to the media he would be aboard.) He was now at the mercy of the Russian authorities. There was good reason for keeping him in a virtual prison in Russia. "He can compromise thousands of intelligence and military officials," Sergei Alexandrovich Markov, the co-Chairman of the National Strategic Council of Russia and an adviser to Putin, pointed out, "We can't send him back just because America demands it."

So Snowden was consigned to the transit zone of the airport, which is a twilight zone neither inside nor outside of Russia, a netherworld that extends beyond the confines of the airport to include safe houses and other facilities maintained by the FSB for the purposes of interrogation and security. Stranded at the Moscow airport, Snowden had no place to go except into the waiting arms of the FSB. No matter what he had believed earlier in Hong Kong, he would quickly realize that he had only one viable option: seeking sanctuary in Russia.

Even though the FSB is known by US intelligence to run a strict regime over present and former members of foreign intelligence services, Snowden may not have realized the full extent of the FSB's interest in him. He naively told the *Washington Post* in December 2013 in Moscow, "I am still working for the NSA right now. They are the only ones who don't realize it." While he might have sincerely persuaded himself that he was somehow helping US communications intelligence in a self-appointed role, those familiar with the activities of the Russian security services find it inconceivable that he could escape their control in Russia. At the very minimum, a former US intelligence worker who stole American state secrets, such as Snowden, would be under the FSB's scrutiny. Andrei Soldatov, the co-author of the 2010 book The *New Nobility: the Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB*, and who was personal knowledgeable about FSB procedures, explained the FSB would monitor "every facet of Snowden's communications, and his life." General Oleg Kalugin, who, as previously mentioned, defected from the KGB to the United States in 1995, added that the FSB following the standard operating procedures of the KGB, would be "his hosts and they are taking care of him." Kalugin further said in 2014 that "Whatever he had access to in his former days at NSA, I believe he shared all of it with the Russians, and they are very grateful"

American intelligence officers knowledgeable about the operations of the FSB, agreed with Kalugin's assessment. General Hayden, for example, who served both as director of the NSA, CIA, and Air Force counterintelligence, told me in an interview that he saw no other possibility than Snowden would be induced to cooperate in this situation, saying "I would lose all respect for the Russian and Chinese security services if they haven't fully exploited everything Snowden had to give." They certainly had that opportunity at Sheremetyevo International Airport: He had already, at least in the eyes of the Department of Justice, betrayed US secrets by stealing them and taking them abroad. Snowden was held in limbo in the transit zone. The FSB controlled his access to food, lodgings, the Internet, and whatever else he needed to survive there. It could also return him to the US if he did not cooperate. What recourse did Snowden have? The only party from whom he could seek redress was Putin's regime. Russia's leverage now would be even greater than in Hong Kong. If Putin chose to fully apply it, would be all but irresistible over a fugitive who had literally no place else to go. In a word, the FSB held all the cards but one—Snowden's help with the stolen documents. Even if Snowden disliked the tactics of the Russian security services, his situation left him a powerful inducement now not to decline the requests of the Russian authorities.

Two weeks after his arrival, the Russian authorities provided him with a convenient path to full cooperation with Russia. He was put in contact with Anatoly Grigorievich Kucherena, a silver-haired 53-year old lawyer, who was known as a personal friend of Putin. Kucherena also did task for Putin's party in the Russian parliament or Duma. Most important for Snowden, Kucherena had excellent connections in the Russian security apparatus since he served on the oversight committee of the FSB. He also offered to serve as the lawyer for Snowden pro bono. On July 10, 2013, Snowden officially retained him as his legal representative in Moscow. From that point on, he would act as Snowden's go-between with the FSB and other Russian agencies.

At the outset, Kucherena made it clear to Snowden that he would have to play by Moscow's rules before the Kremlin would grant him permission to stay in Russia. To begin with, Snowden had to withdraw any and application he had made elsewhere for asylum. He had to put his fate entirely in the hands of Putin's Russia. He would also have to be fully candid with the Russian authorities about what was of great value to Putin: the secret documents he had acquired.

Two days later, Snowden made his first public appearance in Russia. It had been, like previous press conferences with US defectors to Russia, carefully managed, First, Snowden arrived by limousine at the international transit lounge of Sheremetyevo airport. He was seated at a table with Harrison. As Snowden spoke no Russian, a Russian translator was provided. The small audience included hand-picked Russian officials, including some Putin's close associates. They were ushered through passport control by security men to the otherwise cordoned-off lounge. The cameras for RT television and other Russian channels were already in place. When everyone had taken their seats, Snowden announced in a quiet voice that was seeking asylum in Russia. Ten minutes later, Snowden and Harrison were escorted back to the limousine which drove off to an unannounced destination.

Snowden received Russian identification papers on August 1, 2013 that allowed him to resettle in Moscow. Not only was he provided with a residence but he was allowed to set up in it a broadcasting studio that could be used for Internet appearance at well-attended events around the world, such as South by Southwest, TED, and other Internet conferences. Snowden was, according to Kucherena, was also furnished with bodyguards. To help earn his keep, he was employed at an unidentified Moscow cyber-security firm. To complete his resettlement, Lindsay Mills, whom he had left behind in Hawaii, was given a 3-month visa and was allowed to temporarily live with him in Moscow. This afforded him a life style which Snowden described in an interview as "great."

Kucherena, although he was acting without compensation from Snowden, later received the stunning sum of one million dollars from Open Road Films, the distributor for Oliver Stone's "Snowden" movie, for the rights to his not completed novel called "Time of the Octopus," a story based on his story of Snowden's stay at the airport.

It would strain credibility that such privileges would be awarded to an intelligence defector who had refused to cooperate with Russian authorities. In Snowden's case, he was even allowed to participate in a Putin's telethon on state-controlled television. On it, he was called on to ask Putin if the Russian government violated the privacy of Russian citizens in the same way that the American government violated rights of its citizens. Putin, smiling at Snowden's presumably vetted question, answered in a single word: "No."

In the Moscow scenario, Snowden received sanctuary, support, perks and high-level treatment by Putin himself because he agreed to cooperate. If Snowden had not paid the price of admission, either in Russia or before his arrival, he would not have been accorded this privileged status.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Keys to the Kingdom Are Missing

"There's a zero percent chance the Russians or Chinese have received any documents."

--Edward Snowden in Moscow

The critical missing piece in Snowden enigma is the whereabouts of the NSA documents. Greenwald told the Associated Press that the documents that Snowden had taken from the NSA constituted " the instruction manual for how the NSA is built" and they "would allow somebody who read them to know exactly how the NSA does what it does, which would in turn allow them to evade that surveillance or replicate it." Snowden indeed said on camera in June 2013 that NSA investigators would have "a heart attack" when they discovered the extent the breach. Ledgett, the NSA official who it will be recalled had conducted the damage assessment, while not having a heart attack, confirmed that the files Snowden had taken a massive number of files, which he pout at over one million documents, and, among them, what he deemed the NSA's "keys to the kingdom." These so-called "keys to the kingdom" presumably could open up the mechanism through the United States learns about the secret activities of other nations, and, by doing so, bring down the American signals intelligence system that had for 60 years monitored government communications. It had also kept track of adversaries' missile telemetry, submarine movements, and nuclear proliferation.

The Snowden breach was not without precedent at the NSA. There had been two Russian spies at the NSA during the Cold War, Jack Dunlap and David Boone who took a limited number of documents, but no one since the end of the Cold War had taken a single NSA classified document. Now an insider removed, by any count, tens of thousands of NSA's documents. Moreover, many of these documents were classified "TS/SCI"—Top Secret, Sensitive Compartmentalized Information—which, as NSA secrets went, were the gold standard of espionage. Whatever the assessment of Snowden's motivation, the single question that needed to be answered was: What happened to these stolen files?

To begin with, there is a huge disparity between the number of documents that the NSA calculated that Snowden compromised and the number of documents he is known to have handed over to journalists in Hong Kong on a thumb drive. After the Snowden breach, the House and Senate intelligence committees asked the NSA how many documents were taken by Snowden. Even though the NSA had employed a world class team of computer scientists, cryptanalysts and forensic experts to reconstruct the crime from the logs, it could not come up with a definitive number. What it could say was how many documents had been highlighted or selected, coped and moved to another computer. As the NSA briefed these committees in closed-door sessions, 1.7 million had been selected in two dozen NSA computers during Snowden's brief tenure at Booz Allen in 2013. This total included documents from the Department of Defense, NSA and CIA. Of these "touched" documents, some 1.3 million of them had been copied and moved to another computer. The selection of these documents by Snowden could hardly be considered an accident since Snowden had used pre-programmed spiders to find and index these documents. In addition he had stated that he took the job at Booz Allen to get access to data that had been copied. So, as far as the NSA was concerned the 1.3 million documents he copied and moved were considered compromised. On top of this haul, Snowden had copied files while working at Dell in 2012. The total number he stole there is unknown, however, because, as a system administrator there, he could download data without leaving a digital trail. At best, the NSA investigation could only count the documents that were published or referred to in the press and those found on the thumb drive intercepted in London that traced back to his 2012 work at Dell. As previously mentioned, more than half the published documents had been taken during Snowden's time at Dell.

Snowden supporters, to be sure, do not accept that Snowden stole such a large number of documents. According to Greenwald, the NSA vastly exaggerated the magnitude of the theft in order to "demonize" Snowden. Snowden also disputed the 1.7 million number. He told James Bamford of *Wired* in early 2014, that he took far less than the 1.7 million documents that the NSA reported was compromised. He further claimed in that same interview that he purposely left behind at the NSA base in Hawaii "a trail of digital bread crumbs" so that the NSA could determine which documents he "touched" but did not download. If so, these "bread crumbs" were missed by the NSA according to its statement.

It is within the realm of possibility that the NSA Damage Assessment team under Ledgett falsified its finding to inflate the number of documents that Snowden stole. NSA executives also might have lied to Congress to the same end. But why would these officials engage in an orchestrated deception that made them look bad? Ledgett, after all, had been in charge of the National Threat Operations Center from which most of the Level 3 documents were stolen. By exaggerating the magnitude of the theft it would also magnify Ledgett and other NSA's failure in its mission to protect US secrets. Certainly they had no reason to demonize him for legal reasons. Greenwald and Poitras had already effectively demonized him in this regard. They revealed that Snowden had given them a vast number of NSA classified documents on a thumb drive that revealed, as Greenwald put it, the "blueprints" of the NSA. This drive contained, it will be recalled, no few than 58,000 documents. As was discussed in Chapter I, just revealing the partial content of a single document to a journalist, as in the case of CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling, could result in two years in prison. So in the eyes of the law disclosing the full contents of 58,000 highly-classified documents constituted an unprecedented breach of the laws passed to protect communications intelligence. In any case, safely ensconced in Russia, Snowden was not in any legal jeopardy no matter how many documents it was claimed by the government that he stole. It is also makes little sense that the numbers were falsified by the Department to tarnish Snowden's image. The 35-page Defense Intelligence Agency's damage assessment, for example, that said that 900,000 Pentagon documents were compromised by Snowden, was *not* made public. It was only disclosed via a *Vice* magazine Freedom of Information request in June 2015.

What is known is the number of documents that Snowden gave to journalists in Hong Kong. As will be recalled, Poitras and Greenwald were "writing partners." When Greenwald discovered that his copy of the documents were corrupted, Poitras made a copy of the thumb drive that Snowden gave her in Hong Kong and sent it to her Greenwald in Rio de Janeiro by a courier. That courier was intercepted by British authorities at Heathrow Airport. When examined, the Poitras-Greenwald thumb drive contained some 58,000 documents. This meant that the lion's share of the 1.3 million documents that the NSA claimed were compromised had not been given to journalists and is unaccounted for.

The numbers game is not only misleading nut unenlightening on the issue of the value of the compromised documents. Many of the putative 1.3 million documents that the NSA says were copied and moved were duplicate copies. Others were outdated or otherwise useless routing data. So the quantity does not tell the story. Of far more importance than the quantity of the total haul is the quality of some of the data that Snowden had copied. Just a single one of these documents could cripple not just the NSA but America's entire multi-billion dollar apparatus for intercepting foreign intelligence. The previously-cited summary of requests by the CIA, FBI, Pentagon and other agencies for communications intelligence, for example, which was 31,000 pages long, listed all the gaps in U.S. coverage of adversaries, including those cited by President Obama's national security team. As Ledgett warned, this single document, if it fell into enemy hands, would provide out adversaries with "a roadmap of what we know what we don't know and imp/licitly a way to protect themselves." The "roadmap" was not found among the files on the thumb drive. Nor were most of the missing level 3 lists concerning NSA activities in Russia and China found on the thumb drive, even though Snowden said he took taken his final job at Booz Allen to get access to these lists. If Snowden had not given these documents to Poitras, Greenwald or other journalists, where were they?

The compartment logs showed that Snowden copied and transferred these level 3 documents in his final week at the NSA. He presumably had them in his possession in Hong Kong after he arrived on May 20, 2013. On June 3rd, according to Greenwald, he was still sorting through the material to determine which ones were appropriate to give to journalists. On June 12th 2013, he told reporter Lana Lam in Hong Kong that he was going through the documents, country by country, to determine which additional ones he should pass on to journalists. Eleven days later, he departed Hong Kong for Moscow carrying at least one laptop computer. Even after arriving in Moscow, he suggested he still had NSA secrets in his possession. "No intelligence service — not even our own — has the capacity to compromise the secrets I continue to protect, " he wrote to former Senator Gordon Humphrey, "I cannot be coerced into revealing that information, even under torture." Much of the material he copied while working at Booz Allen remained, as far as the NSA could determine, missing. Had he brought these files under his "protection" to Russia?

An answer came three months later from his Moscow lawyer, Anatoly Kucherena. On September 23, 2013, Kucherena had an extensive interviewed on the state owned RT channel. The interviewer Sophie Shevardnadze, who had a show on RT Television, called “Sophie & Co,” was well-admired journalist in her own right. She is also the grand-daughter of Edward Shevardnadze, a former foreign minister and Politburo member of the Soviet Union and, after the Soviet Union broke up, the first president of Georgia. Even though she had interviewed many top political figures in Russia, obtaining an hour-long interview with Kucherena was a coup since, up until then, he had not discussed the subject in Snowden in a television interview. About half-way through the interview, she brought up a highly-sensitive subject of the disposition of the NSA documents. She directly asked Kucherena if Snowden given all the documents he had taken from the NSA to journalists in Hong Kong.

If anyone was in a position to know about these documents, it was Kucherena. He had acted as an intermediary for Snowden in his negotiations with Russian authorities, including the FSB. As such, he would be privy to the status of the secret material that was of immense concern to the Russian intelligence services. When I interviewed Kucherena in Moscow in 2015, he told me that “all the reports” concerning Snowden had been turned over to him by “Russian authorities” in July 2013. “I had all of Snowden’s statements,” he said. If so, he presumably knew what Snowden had told the Russian security services prior

Had Snowden come to Russia with empty hands or bearing gifts? Kucherena answered her question without any evasion. He said that Snowden had only given “some” of the NSA’s documents in his possession to journalists in Hong Kong. He had kept the remaining documents in his possession. That confirmed what Snowden had told Greenwald. Poitras and Lam in Hong Kong. Snowden told them that he had divided the stolen NSA documents into two separate sets of documents. One set he gave to Poitras and Greenwald on thumb drives. The other set, which he told them that he considered too sensitive for these journalists, he retained for himself. As late as July 14, 2013, Greenwald told the Associated Press that Snowden held back documents and “ "is in possession of literally thousands of documents ... that would allow somebody who read them to know exactly how the NSA does what it does, which would in turn allow them to evade that surveillance or replicate it." One issue for U.S. investigators at the NSA, CIA and Department of Defense was what Snowden did with the second set *after* his meetings with the journalists in Hong Kong. Did he take these documents with him to Russia?

Shevardnadze, who makes it a point to drill her interviewees, pressed Kucherena as to whether Snowden still had these NSA files, or “material” in Russia. The dialogue went as follows (from the transcript supplied to me by Shevardnadze.)

> Shevardnadze: So he [Snowden] does have some materials that haven’t been made public yet?
>
> Kucherena: Certainly.

After establishing some part of Snowden's "material" was still in his possession, Shevardnadze asked the next logical question: "Why did Russia get involved in this whole thing if it got nothing out of?"

In response, Kucherena elliptically hinted that the unreleased material contained CIA secret files. "Snowden spent quite a few years working for the CIA." He said. "We haven't fully realized yet the importance of his revelations." (He was correct that Snowden had stolen a larger number of CIA documents that he had not turned over to journalists, as CIA deputy director Morell confirmed.)

Whatever this material might reveal, the FSB was presumably aware of its existence. After all, Kucherena was on the FSB's public oversight board. If he had kept Snowden's possessions of these documents secret from the FSB, he would not have divulged it in an interview on television.

Kucherena's answer left little ambiguity to the critical question about the fate of the NSA's missing documents: Snowden had not destroyed the electronic files of NSA documents that he had not distributed to journalists. He still had them, when Kucherena had reviewed his files in Russia. Kucherena's disclosure that Snowden retained these crucial documents did not contradict Snowden's own story at the time of the Shevardnadze interview. Indeed, it was completely consistent with the statement Snowden made three weeks after arriving in Russia in his previously-mentioned email to Senator Humphrey.

Snowden subsequently changed his story. In mid-October, Snowden electronically-informed journalists that he had destroyed all the NSA documents in his possession before flying to Moscow. So his new story radically contradicted what his own lawyer had said the previous month on television.

To be sure, Kucherena who later confirmed the accuracy of the Shevardnadze interview to me in Moscow in 2015 may have meant to say that Snowden only had access to the NSA documents rather than having the physical files in his possession. It is certainly possible that Snowden transferred the NSA files from his own computers and thumb drives to storage on a remote server in the so-called "cloud" before coming to Russia. The "cloud" is actually not in the sky but a term used for remote storage servers, such as those provided by Drop Box, Microsoft, Google, Amazon and other Internet companies. Anyone who is connected to the Internet can store and retrieved files by entering a user name and a password. For Kucherena to be certain Snowden had access to this data, Snowden must have demonstrated his access either to him or the authorities. The Russians therefore also knew Snowden had the means to retrieve this data. Since the data concerned electronic espionage against Russia, the FSB had every reason to ask him to share his user name and password. If Snowden had encrypted these files, it would also ask for his encryption key. And the FSB is not known to take a no for an answer in issues involving espionage.

Even if Snowden refused to furnish his key, it would not present an insurmountable barrier for the FSB. Snowden may have had confidence in the power of his encryption protocols but, according to a former National Security Council staffer, the Russian cyber service in 2013 had the means, the time and the incentive to break the encryption. It is unlikely they would have gone to the trouble since they had Snowden in the palm of their hand in Moscow. It doesn't take a great stretch of the imagination to conclude that, by one way or another, willingly or under duress, Snowden shared his access to his treasure trove of documents with the agencies that were literally in control of his life in Russia.

Kucherena's answer to the question of access also may help to explain Putin's decision to allow Snowden to come to Moscow. As has been discussed earlier, it was not a minor sacrifice for Putin. His foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, had spent almost six months negotiating with Hillary Clinton's State Department a one-on-one summit between President Obama and President Putin. Not only would this summit be a diplomatic coup for Russia but it would add to Putin's personal credibility in advance of the Olympic Games in Russia. In mid-June, after US intelligence reported to Obama's National Security adviser that Snowden was in contact with Russian officials in Hong Kong, the State Department explicitly told Lavrov that allowing Snowden to defect to Russia would be viewed by President Obama as a blatantly unfriendly act. As such, it could (and did) lead to the cancellation of the planned summit. So Putin knew the downside of admitting Snowden.

But there was also an upside if Snowden had access to the NSA documents. A large archive of files containing the sources of the NSA's electronic interceptions, as Snowden claimed he had in Hong Kong, had enormous potential intelligence value Putin therefore had to choose between the loss of an Obama summit and the gain of an intelligence coup. That Putin chose the latter suggests that he had calculated that the utility of the intelligence that the NSA archive outweighed the public relations advantages of the Obama summit (which, after Snowden arrived in Moscow, was cancelled by Obama.) Would Putin have made such a sacrifice if Snowden had destroyed or refused to share the stolen data? "No country, not even the United States, would grant sanctuary to an intelligence defector who refused to be cooperative," answered a former CIA officer who had spent a decade dealing with Russian intelligence defectors. "That's not how it works." If so, it seems plausible to me that, as Kucherena said, that Snowden's documents were accessible to him either on a computer or via storage in the cloud after he arrived in Moscow. It explains why Russia exfiltrated him from Hong Kong and provided him with a safe haven,

The Quickly Changing Narrative

Just three weeks after Kucherena's stunning disclosure, Snowden changed the narrative. His first exchange with an American journalist after his arrival in Russia was not until October 1`7, 2013. It was conducted over the Internet with James Risen, a Pulitzer-prize winning *New York Times* reporter. Essentially Snowden supplied answers to a set of questions. In then, Snowden now asserted he took no documents to Russia. The subsequent front-page story, which carried the headline, "Snowden Says He Took No Secret Files to Russia," reported that Snowden claimed that he gave all his documents to journalists in Hong Kong and he brought none of them to Russia. He also said that he was "100 percent" certain that no foreign intelligence service had had access to them at any point during his journey from Honolulu to Moscow.

When I later asked Kucherena in Moscow why Snowden changed his story in direct contradiction of what Kucherena had stated, he said "Wizner." He was referring to Ben Wizner, a top-drawer ACLU lawyer based in Washington D.C. Wizner had joined the ACLU in August 2001 after graduating NYU law school and clerking for a Federal judge. At the ACLU, he became an effective foe of NSA surveillance. "I had spent ten years before this [Snowden leak] trying to bring lawsuits against the intelligence community," he explained in an interview with *Forbes* in 2014. Prior to the Snowden leak, he had been consulted frequently by Poitras on government surveillance issues (and appeared in Poitras' 2010 documentary "The Oath.") He had also been engaged in a law suit aimed at exposing the NSA's subpoenas for Verizon records.

He had first learned about Snowden in early 2013, while Snowden was still working for the NSA, from Poitras. At that time, Poitras did not know Snowden's real name, but she revealed to Wizner that she had found an anonymous source with access to U.S. government surveillance secrets. So he was not completely surprised when Glenn Greenwald, Poitras' writing partner, asked him in July 2013 to contact Snowden in Russia.

Snowden offered an opportunity for Wizner since the ACLU already had been pursuing a suit in Federal court against the government's seizure of Verizon's billing records. If he could induce Snowden to retain him and the ACLU, he could claim standing in Federal court to represent Snowden in the case. He also fully believed in the salutary benefit of Snowden's revelations. They communicated over Skype, according to Kucherena. When they discussed Snowden's legal situation in America, Snowden expressed an interest in obtaining some form of amnesty from prosecution in America. Wizner was willing to attempt to explore making a possible deal with the Department of Justice, but it would not be an easy task, especially if Snowden had turned over NSA documents to a foreign power.

Even to argue that Snowden was merely a NSA whistle-blower presented a serious challenge for Wizner. The ACLU had been involved with three previous NSA whistle-blowers, William E. Binney, Thomas A. Drake, and Russell D. Tice, but Snowden's case differed from those cases in an important ways. Binney, Drake, and Tice had not intentionally taken any NSA documents. Snowden, on the other hand, had not only taken a large NSA documents but released tens of thousands of these top secret files to journalists based in Germany and Brazil as well as other unauthorized recipients. In addition, the Whistle Blower Protection Act, passed by Congress in 1989, does not exempt an insider who signs a secrecy oath, such as Snowden, from the legal consequences of disclosing classified documents to journalists or other unauthorized persons. Consequently, getting some form of amnesty for Snowden required changing Snowden's public image from that of a person who had damaged America to an image of a person who had helped America. But if Snowden had taken even a single top secret document to Russia, the case could be made that he had stolen communications intelligence secrets with intent to damage the United States, which under the law could be considered espionage. In this regard, Kucherena's disclosure was extremely damaging to Snowden's position.

One way to mitigate the damage from it was for Snowden to substitute a new narrative. In it, he would say to say to hand-picked journalists that he had given all his documents to Poitras and Greenwald in Hong Kong and took none of them to Russia, Wizner could then argue that documents such as the FISA warrant were improperly classified secret and that disclosing them served the public good. The government might not be able to contest his claim without further revealing NSA sources. Under these circumstances, it might be induced to agree to a plea bargain for Snowden. Changing the narrative would also help enhance his public image as a whistle-blower,

Whatever the reasoning that led to it, Snowden's new narrative was that he had destroyed all the documents he had in his possession before coming to Moscow and had no access to any NSA documents, not even those that he had distributed to journalists.

Snowden reinforced this narrative in almost in a series f interviews arranged by Wizner. In December 2013, he met with Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post*. It was his first face-to-face meeting with a journalist since he had arrived in Russia in June. To advance his narrative , Snowden turned on his laptop to Gellman and, as if proving his point, said to him "there's nothing on it… my hard drive is completely blank." That his computer had no files stored on it actually meant very little. The files could have been transferred to another device, or, as was discussed earlier, to a server in the cloud. Gellman probed further by asking the precise whereabouts of the files, but, as he reported, Snowden declined to answer that question. All that he would say was that he was "confident he did not expose them to Chinese intelligence in Hong Kong." Since that answer did not nail down the issue, Wizner arranged for *Vanity Fair*, which was preparing an article on Snowden, to submit questions. In his reply to them, Snowden wrote s that he destroyed all his files in Hong Kong because he didn't want to risk bringing them to Russia. He expanded on this claim in three more interviews arranged by Wizner. These interviews were with three journalists who themselves had opposed NSA surveillance: James Bamford writing for *Wired* magazine, Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the *Guardian* and Katrina vanden Heuvel, the editor of *The Nation.* He also gave a televised interview to Brian Williams of NBC News in which he explained that since he had no access to the NSA documents in Russia, he could not provide access to the Russians even if they "break my fingers."

Snowden did he specify where, when or how the putative destruction of the files occurred, and offered no witnesses or evidence, other than a blank laptop screen to corroborate it. Even though his new narrative was widely accepted by the media, a self-serving claim by a perpetrator that files have been destroyed cannot be accepted at face value in a digital age in which files can be copied to another computer or moved to the "cloud" with the click of a key,. After all Snowden went to considerable risk to select, copy, and steal these Level 3 documents in mid-May before leaving Hawaii for Hong Kong. They were the last medium of value he held in Hong Kong. These secrets were his potential bargaining chips. Why would he simply erase them in June in Hong Kong? It is also difficult for me to accept that he would destroy these documents because he feared the Russians might get them. If he was so concerned about the ability of Russian intelligence, he could have stayed in Hong Kong and fought extradition instead of flying to Russia. Once he made his arrangements to go to Russia, he must have realized that even without the files on his computer, the Russian intelligence service could still obtain the NSA secrets he held in his head. Indeed, as he told the New York Times, the secrets he held in his head would have devastating consequences for NSA operations.

In light of Kucherena statement that Snowden had access to NSA documents in Russia, it would require some form of a suspension of disbelief to accept Snowden's new narrative. But even if one was willing to accept his erasure claim, it still would not mean that the NSA documents had not fallen into the hands of adversaries.

If he had destroyed all of the electronic copies of the NSA's data before boarding his flight to Moscow, he could he be "100 percent" certain, as he claimed that the data had not been accessed by others prior to his departure from Hong Kong. His files could have been copied without his knowledge, just as he had copied them without the NSA's knowledge. As former U.S. intelligence officers pointed out to me, adversary services could not be expected to shirk from employing their full capabilities once they learned that an American "agent of special services," as Putin called him, had brought stolen NSA documents to Hong Kong. The *New York Times* reported from Hong Kong that two sources, both of whom worked for major government intelligence agencies, "said they believed that the Chinese government had managed to drain the contents of the four laptops that Mr. Snowden said he brought to Hong Kong." That China had the capability to obtain Snowden's data was also the view of former CIA Deputy Director Morell. He said: "Both the Chinese and the Russians would have used everything in their tool kit—from human approaches to technical attacks—to get at Snowden's stolen data."

Snowden would not have been a particularly difficult target for them, especially after he started disclosing secrets to journalists at the Mira hotel in Hong Kong. Not only could the Chinese service approach the security staff at the Mira Hotel but they could track him after he left the hotel and moved, along with his computers, in and out of several residences arranged by his "carer." Snowden, after all, had put himself in the hands of people whom he had never met before including three Hong Kong lawyers, a "carer" and three *Guardian* journalists. Presumably, the efforts of these adversary intelligence services to find him, and the NSA data, would further intensify after Snowden revealed to the *South China Morning Post* on June 14, 2013 that he had access to NSA lists of computers in China and elsewhere that the NSA had penetrated.

It wouldn't be only the Chinese service on his trail. The Russian intelligence service would also likely be tasked to acquire these NSA documents after Snowden's meeting with Russian officials in Hong Kong. And while he could get away with giving coy and elusive answers to journalists who asked him about the whereabouts of the NSA data, the Russian and Chinese officials in Hong Kong, who could offer him an escape route from prison, likely would demand more specific answers about the whereabouts of data they had no already obtained by technical means.

The Post- Hong Kong Documents

The NSA concern about who had access to its missing files deepened further when NSA documents continued to surface in the press *after* Snowden went to Moscow. If US intelligence needed any further evidence that someone had access to the documents, these additional revelations provided it. The most sensational of them was a purported document attributed to Snowden concerning the NSA hacking the cell phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The story was published on October 23, 2013 on the *Der Spiegel* website. The co-author of the story was Jacob Appelbaum. Even though Snowden had by now been in Russia for four months, he was cited, along with unnamed "others" as the source for the NSA document. Nor did Snowden deny it. Indeed. He took a measure of credit for the revelation, saying on German TV "What I can say is we know Angela Merkel was monitored by the National Security Agency." If Snowden's had released this document, it would be consistent with Kucherena's assertion that Snowden had access to the archive.

Adding to the intrigue, Poitras was apparently caught by surprise when the Merkel story broke in *Der Spiegel*. She urgently texted Snowden on what she called "background" (which ordinarily means that a journalist will not attribute information to a source.) She asked him in the text to explain the NSA's actions. Snowden explained to her that Merkel was listed by her true name (and not by a codename) in the NSA document because the German chancellor was a NSA "target not an asset." Presumably, Poitras would have already known that distinction if she had the document referred to in *Der Spiegel*. If the Merkel document was not among the data given to Poitras in Hong Kong , how did it get to the authors of the *Der Spiegel* article?

One of the authors, Appelbaum, as discussed earlier, had been in contact with Snowden before he went public. He had served as Poitras' co-interrogator of Snowden while he was still working at the NSA in May 2013. Appelbaum also, was one of the leading supporters of Wikileaks. Since he was famously an advocate of revealing government secrets, it seems unlikely that he would have delayed releasing such a bombshell about Merkel's phone if Snowden had given him this document *before* he had left Hong Kong in June 2013. Why would Appelbaum kept it secret for more than four months? The same pressure to publish would also apply to the journalists Snowden had dealt with in Hong Kong. If Snowden had given Poitras, Greenwald, Lam or MacAskill the Merkel document, or even told them about it in their interviews with him in Hong Kong, the *Guardian* would have certainly rushed out such a scoop.

According to source with knowledge of the Snowden investigation, there was no document referencing any spying on Merkel's phone among the 58,000 documents on the thumb drive that Snowden had given Poitras and Greenwald in Hong Kong. That absence would explain why Poitras had to send a text to Snowden in Moscow to ask for an explanation after the story broke. Further confirmation of the absence of this document in the material Snowden provided journalists in Hong Kong comes from James Bamford, a well-respected expert on the NSA. In the course of researching his 2014 article on Snowden for *Wired* magazine, he was given access to all the documents Snowden gave to Poitras, Greenwald and Gellman. Bamford used a sophisticated indexing program to search through the database specifically for The Merkel material. , Even so, he did not find any. He reported that no document that even mentioned Merkel given to journalists in Hong Kong mentioned Merkel. It therefore appeared that the Merkel document was provided to *Der Spiegel* after Snowden went to Moscow in June. If so, some party had access to NSA documents after Snowden arrived in Russia and provided the authors of the *Der Spiegel* story with the scoop. In that context, it may have not been a pure coincide that Kucherena's disclosed that Snowden had access to documents which he had not given to journalists in Hong Kong shortly before just such a document was [published in Germany.

For his part, Bamford explored the possibility that there might be another mole in the NSA. Was it possible another person in the NSA was stealing documents? He wrote Poitras and asked her whether the Merkel document could have come from another person in the NSA. He notes that she declined, via a letter from her lawyer, to answer that question. But since she had not been the author of the *Der Spiegel* article, and it had not been given the document, there is no reason to she would know its provenance.

The post-Hong Kong documents did not stop with the Merkel one. Documents continued to emerge years after Snowden arrived in Moscow. In June 2015, for example, the Wikileaks website released another putative Snowden document two years after he had supposedly wiped his computer clean in Hong Kong. It revealed that the NSA had targeted the telephones of the three consecutive presidents of France-- Jacque Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande, all of whom were allies of the United States. Moreover, according to a former NSA official, this 2015 document, like the 2013 Merkel material, not among the data on the thumb drive given to journalists in Hong Kong. The released on the Wikileaks site came at an embarrassing time since in the midst of NATO war games held near the Russian border, which Putin had vehemently denounced, The accompanying article was co-authored by Julian Assange, who now claimed to have access to Snowden's NSA material. Since Assange, it will be recalled, had been in telephonic contact with Snowden in Hong Kong and his deputy, Sarah Harrison, had spent five months in Moscow with Snowden in 2013, it is certainly possible Snowden was his source. But it seems difficult to believe that Assange waited two years before publishing since he has made it part of his modus operandi to publish documents immediately. And since Wikileaks receives documents anonymously via its TOR software, any party, with access the Snowden files, could have sent it.

Greenwald and Poitras also released belated documents. On July 15, 2015, for example, their web publication *The Intercept* released a Snowden document that t cited a NSA intercept of Israeli military communications about an Israeli raid in Syria on August 1, 2008. It revealed that in it a group of Israeli commandos killed General Suleiman, a top aide to President Assad who had been working with North Korea to build a nuclear facility in Syria. Israel had destroyed that facility in Operation Orchard nearly a year earlier. Whatever the purpose of this new release of a NSA document (which had little, if anything, to do with any of the NSA's own operations); it was not among the data that Snowden had given Poitras and Greenwald in Hong Kong in 2013, according to a source with access to the investigation. If so Poitras and Greenwald, like Appelbaum and Assange, were still receiving NSA documents that Snowden had allegedly stolen a long time after he claimed he had destroyed all his files.

The NSA reportedly determined that these belated documents, all of which concerned American allies in Germany, France and Israel, had been among the material copied during the Snowden breach. They provided further reason to believe that someone still had access to the documents that were not distributed to journalists in Hong Kong. Kucherena's disclosure just before the first post-Hong Kong release that Snowden still had access to the NSA files made it appear plausible that Snowden sent these documents to *Der Spiegel, Wikileaks* and *The Intercept*. A former high-ranking KGB officer I interviewed had a very different view. He told me that in his experience an intelligence defector to Russia would not be allowed to distribute secret material to journalists without explicit approval by the security service tending him. , and that this injunction would be especially true in the case of Snowden after Putin publicly had forbade him from releasing U.S. intelligence data. The alternative is that this material was released at the behest of the Russian intelligence service.

The mystery of the post Hong Kong documents also intrigued members in the US intelligence community with whom I discussed it. When I asked a former intelligence executive about the ultimate source for the Merkel story, he responded: "If Snowden didn't give journalists this document in Hong Kong, we can assume an intermediary fed it to Appelbaum to publish in *Der Spiegel*?" According to him, the NSA investigation had determined that Snowden indeed had copied a NSA list of cell phone numbers of foreign leaders, including the number of Merkel. This list became the basis of the *Der Spiegel* story. It was also clear that Snowden in Moscow gave credence to the release. He made a major point about the hacking of Merkel's phone in an interview with *Wired* magazine in 2014. Just about two weeks before the leak, Kucherena said Snowden still had access to the documents. Clearly, someone had access. But whoever was behind it, the release of information about the alleged bugging Merkel's phone resulted in badly fraying US relations with Germany in the midst of developing troubles in Ukraine. As it later turned, according to the investigation of the German federal prosecutor concluded in 2015, there was no evidence found in this document, or elsewhere, that Merkel's calls were ever actually intercepted. Although they revealed little, if anything, the intelligence services of Germany, France and Israel were not already aware of, they raised a public outcry in allies against NSA surveillance, and the outcry became the event itself.

While these post-Hong Kong documents had little, if any, intelligence value, they provided further evidence that at least part of the stolen NSA documents was in the hands of a party hostile to the United States. If so, it wasn't much of a leap to assume that this party also had access to the far more valuable Level 3 documents revealing the NSA's sources and methods, such as the one that Ledgett had described as a "road map" to U.S. electronic espionage against Russia and China.

Within the intelligence community, this concern was heightened by new counter measure to this espionage employed by Russia and China after Snowden reached Moscow. For example, there were indications that the NSA had lost part of its capabilities to follow Russian troop movements in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. U.S. intelligence officials even went so far as to suggest, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* that " Russian planners might have gotten a jump on the West by evading U.S. eavesdropping."
. Britain also discovered that some of its secret operations had been compromised after Snowden went to Moscow. According to a 2015 story in the *Sunday Times* of London, British intelligence had determined that Britain's intelligence- gathering sources had been exposed to adversary services by documents that Snowden had stolen from the NSA in 2013. These documents had been provided to the NSA by the GCHQ, the British cipher service. Unless such intelligence disasters were freak aberrations, it appeared to confirm General Alexander warning in 2014 that the NSA was "losing some of its capabilities, because they're being disclosed to our adversaries."

Snowden’s supporters, to be sure, disputed this view. If only as an act of faith in Snowden’s personal integrity, they continued to believe his avowal to Senator Humphrey that he had acted to protect U.S. secrets by shielding them from adversary intelligence services after he took them abroad. They also continued to take him at his word when he said he had destroyed all the NSA documents before going to Russia. Despite such protestation of Patriotic loyalty, U.S intelligence officials could not so easily dismiss the possibility that the missing documents still existed. After all, a U.S intelligence worker who is dedicated to protecting American secrets from its adversaries does not ordinarily takes them to an adversary country. The NSA, CIA and Department of Defense therefore had little choice but to assume the worst had happened: Russia and China had obtained access to the “keys of the kingdom”. Whatever the extent of the actual damage, it was up to General Alexander’s replacement, Admiral Michael Rogers, both to restore morale and rebuilding the capabilities of America’s electronic intelligence in the wake of the massive breach. According to a National Security staff member in the Obama White House, that job would take more than a decade. Meanwhile, Whoever now held the keys to the kingdom, one thing was certain: the NSA had failed to protect them. This intelligence failure did not happen out of the blue. Meanwhile, Putin added insult to the injury by awarding the alleged perpetrator sanctuary in Russia.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Unheeded Warning

"The NSA—the world's most capable signals intelligence organization, an agency immensely skilled in stealing digital data—had had its pockets thoroughly picked."

- --CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell

In April 2010, the CIA received a stark reminder of the ongoing nature of Russian espionage. It came in the form of a message from one of its best placed moles in the Russian intelligence service. This surreptitious source was Alexander Poteyev, a 54-year old colonel in the SVR, which was the successor agency to the First Chief Directorate of the KGB. While the FSB took over the KGB's domestic role in December 1991, the SVR became Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service. Its operation center was in the Yasenevo district of Moscow. The CIA had recruited Poteyev as its mole in the 1990s when he had been stationed at the Russian Embassy in Washington DC. That it could sustain a mole in Moscow for over a decade attested to its capabilities in the espionage business. After he returned to Moscow, still secretly on the CIA's payroll, he became the deputy chief of the SVR's "American" section. This unit of Russian intelligence had the primary responsibility for establishing spies in CIA, FBI, NSA and other American intelligence agencies.

The SVR's last known (or caught) mole in US Intelligence was CIA officer Harold Nicholson in 1996. Before it could now expand its espionage capabilities. It needed to build a network of Russian sleeper agents in the United States. For this network, it needed to groom so-called "illegals," or agents who were not connected to the Russian Embassy. This so-called "illegals" network was necessary since presumably all Russian diplomats, including the so-called "legal" members of Russian intelligence, were under constant surveillance by the FBI. Advances in surveillance technology in the 21st century had made it increasingly difficult to communicate with recruit through its diplomatic missions. To evade it, the "American" division of the SVR was given the task of placing individuals in the United States disguised as ordinary Americans. Their "legend," or operational cover, could be thin since they would not be applying for jobs in the government. Their job was simply blend in with their community until they were called upon by the "American" department in Moscow to service a mole that had been planted in US intelligence or other part of the US government. Until there were activated by such a call, they were classified as sleeper agents. Unlike the SVR's "legal" officers, who were attached to Russian embassies as diplomats and were protected from arrest by the Treaty of Vienna, the SVR's illegal agents lack diplomatic immunity. According to Pavel Sudoplatov, who defected from the KGB in the Cold War, the sole job of such sleeper agents was to "live under cover in the West awaiting assignments for the Center." One assignment that justifies the expense of maintaining such agents is to service a penetration, after one is made, in the US intelligence establishment. While waiting to be activated for such a job, sleeper agents were instructed to build every detail of their cover identity so as to perfectly blend in with Americans.

To build this American network of sleeper agents took the better part of a decade. In 2005, this SVR's "American" section in Moscow had begun methodically installing "sleeper agents" in the US. Almost all of them were all Russian citizens who had assumed new identities to better blend into their communities.

The CIA learned of this sleeper program through Poteyev soon after it began. The issue was how to exploit this knowledge. When I was writing my book on international deception, Angleton had pointed out to me that "the business of intelligence services is understanding precisely the relationship of their opposition to them." His view, though his opponents inside the CIA would call it with some justification an obsession, was that an intelligence service had focus on the moves of its rivals. To accomplish this "business" in the first decade of the 21st century, the CIA had to establish why its new opposition, the SVR, was laying the foundation for an espionage operation. What were its priorities in the resumption of the intelligence war? Its inside man, Poteyev, in the SVR, provided it with a tremendous advantage in this relationship. It knew the links in a sleeper network that the SVR believed was safely hidden from surveillance. If they were followed, when they were activated they could expose whatever recruits the SVR had in the American government. The CIA duly shared this information about the sleeper ring with the FBI, which had the responsibility for the surveillance of foreign agents in the United States, The FBI, for its part, kept the Russian sleeper agents under tight surveillance—an operation which grew in complexity and expense as more SVR agents arrived in the US.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, Poteyev was following the unfolding operation. Part of his SVR job was to continue preparing these "Americans," as they were called by the SVR, for their assignments. Some had been sent as couples, other as singletons. One of the singletons that Poteyev personally handled was Anna Kushchyenko. She was a strikingly beautiful Russian student, who changed her name to Anna Chapman by briefly marrying a British citizen she met at a rave party. After taking his name, she left him. After completing her training in Russia, the SVR sent her to New York City to establish herself as international real estate specialist. Other "Americans" under Poteyev's watch became travel agents, students, and financial advisers. In all, Poteyev identified to the CIA twelve such sleeper agents. Since they had been instructed to simply act out their role, while awaiting an intelligence assignment, they presented no real threat. Even so, the cost of FBI surveillance over the years became sizable. Around the clock surveillance on the movements and communications of a single individual can cost, according to a former FBI agent, over $10,000 a day.

The situation suddenly changed when the CIA received Poteyev's message in 2010. It warned that Russian military intelligence had asked the SVR to activate some of its sleeper agents for a highly-sensitive assignment. Such a move suggested that Russian intelligence had found a possible source that could supply it with valuable information. According to a former CIA intelligence official who later became involved in the case, the assignment involved preparing these agents to service a potential source in the NSA at Fort Meade, Maryland. If true, it suggested that Russian intelligence either had found or was working on a means of penetrating the NSA.

In 2010, the NSA's "Q" division handled such security and espionage threats. It reportedly initiated a counter-espionage probe at the NSA's Fort Meade headquarters on receiving the tip. But since the NSA's cryptological service had in 2010 no fewer than 35,000 military and civilian contractor employees, the search for a possible leak was no easy matter. According to a subsequent note in the NSA's secret budget report to Congress, it would require "a minimum of 4,000 periodic investigations of employees in position to compromise sensitive information" to safely guard against "insider threats by trusted insiders who seek to exploit their authorized access to sensitive information to harm U.S. interests." According to a former executive in the intelligence community, that amount of investigations far exceeded the budgetary capabilities of the NSA. So while the investigation found no evidence of SVR recruitment, it remained possible that Russian intelligence had found a candidate in the NSA.

Meanwhile, in June 2010, to pre-empt such a leak in US intelligence and avoid any potential embarrassment that could result, the FBI decided it could no longer engage in this sort of an intelligence game with the sleeper network. It arrested all 12 sleeper agents identified by Poteyev. After receiving a great deal of public attention (which led to them inspiring the FX series: The Americans,"), the sleeper agents were deported back to Russia. This move had both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage was that it severed any communication link between the putative person-of-interest in the NSA and Russian intelligence via the sleeper agents. The main disadvantage was that it eliminated the possibility that FBI surveillance of the illegals might lead the FBI to a possible recruit in the NSA or elsewhere.

The pre-emptive arrests also had an unforeseen consequence. They resulted in accidently compromising the CIA's own mole, Poteyev. In entrapping Anna Chapman, who was one of the more active of the sleeper agents, the FBI agent had used a password to deceive her into believing she was speaking to a SVR officer (when in fact she was speaking to an FBI agent who was impersonating one.) That unique password had been personally supplied to her by Poteyev. So Chapman had reason to believe Poteyev had betrayed her,

When Chapman returned to Moscow after the spy exchange, she was taken to a well-publicized dinner with Putin. Afterwards, she informed her debriefer at the SVR that only Poteyev had been in a position to know the password that the FBI agent used. This brought Poteyev under immediate suspicion. Tipped off by the CIA to the FBI's error, Poteyev managed to escape by taking a train from Moscow to Minsk in Belarus. The CIA next exfiltrated him out of Belarus and to the United States. Poteyev had been saved from prison—or worse, but he was no longer useful to the CIA as a mole. Without the services of Poteyev in the SVR in Moscow, US intelligence was unable to find out further details about the mission to which Poteyev's sleeper agents were to be assigned. All it had discovered was the history of the preparations for a major espionage revival. It now knew that the SVR had installed plumbing in America that one or more agents in this network had been activated to handle a possible recruit in the NSA. But without anyone left in the sleeper network to follow and without an inside source in the SVR, it had no further avenues to fruitfully pursue. The revelation of the sleeper agents had little, if any, other intelligence value.

The NSA's own security investigation turned up no evidence of a leak at Fort Meade in 2010. The absence of evidence of a penetration in a security investigation is not in itself evidence of the absence of a penetration. The Russian intelligence service had demonstrated in the past it was well-schooled in covering its tracks in operations against US communications intelligence. For example, CIA counterintelligence had learned from a KGB defector in the early 1960s that Russian intelligence had penetrated the cipher room at the US Embassy in Moscow and, because of this operation, the KGB was able to decipher crucial communications. Even so, it failed to find either the perpetrator or any evidence of his existence for more than a half century. The operation was only definitively revealed by Russian spymaster Sergey Kondrashev in 2007. Tennent Bagley, who headed the CIA's Soviet Bloc counterintelligence at the time, late wrote in his book that the ability of Russian intelligence to conceal this penetration for more than a half century "broke the record for secret keeping."

This Russian ability to penetrate US intelligence was not entirely defeated by America's implementation of more sophisticated security procedures, such as the polygraph examination and extensive background checks. In 1995, only 10 years before Snowden joined it, the CIA's inspector general completed a study of the KGB's use of false defectors to mislead the US government from the end of the Cold War in late 1980s through the mid-1990s. It found Russia had dispatched at least half-dozen double agents who provided misleading information to their CIA case officers. Because the KGB operation went undetected for nearly a decade, the disinformation prepared in Moscow had been incorporated into reports, which had a distinctive blue stripe to signify their importance, had been provided to the three American Presidents, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Even more shocking, in tracing the path of this disinformation, the Inspector General found that the "senior CIA officers responsible for these reports had known that some of their sources for this information were controlled by Russian intelligence," yet they did not inform the President and officials receiving the blue-striped reports, that they had included Russian misinformation. What CIA Director John Deutch called "an inexcusable lapse" also reflected a form of institutional willful blindness in US intelligence, borne out of bureaucratic fear of career embarrassment so well described in LeCarre's spy novels. Detecting intelligence failures has, if anything, become even more difficult in the age of the anonymous Internet.

The NSA's vulnerability to intelligence lapses, which became all too apparent with Snowden, had departed America with a large selection of its most secret documents. The Snowden breach demonstrated the NSA had few, if any, fail-safe defenses against a would-be leakers of communication intelligence. In the new domain of cyber warfare, conventional defensive rules do not apply. "There are no rivers or hills up here. It's all flat. All advantage goes to the attacker," Michael Hayden said in an interview in 2015 with the publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*. His point was that since there are no defensive positions, cyber warfare must rely on an aggressive offensive. If fully successful such attacks would so deeply penetrate the defenses of an adversary intelligence organization that it could not mount any of its own unexpected cyber attacks Such offensive capabilities would make it difficult, if not impossible, for adversary services to recruit a spy in the NSA. .For example, the CIA penetration of the SVR in 2010 prevented it from using its the sleeper network against U.S. targets. "The best defense in this game may be an overwhelming offensive," a former intelligence official said to me. "but that strategy only works if we can keep secret sensitive sources."

Central to this offensive strategy was the NSA's National Threat Operations Center in Oahu, Hawaii. It employed threat analysts to surreptitiously monitor the secret activities of potential enemies, mainly China, Russia and North Korea. A large part of their job was to make transparent to the US the hostile activities of the Russian and Chinese services so that they posed little, if any, intelligence threat to America. This strategy worked so far as the NSA guarded itself but it also raised the issue, as the Roman Juvenal famously warned "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" Who will guard the guards themselves?

Less than three years after the NSA had received the Poteyev warning, a 29-year old civilian trainee at the National Threat Operations Center, demonstrated its glaring vulnerability. Instead of guarding secrets, Snowden stole them. General Hayden described the Snowden breach as the "most serious hemorrhaging of American secrets in the history of American espionage. Among the documents taken in this security breach were lists of secret NSA sources in China and Russia. Despite all the measures the NSA had taken to protect its vital secrets, a lowly civilian employee had walked away with the keys to its kingdom In the hands of their intelligence services, these stolen lists had the potential to totally upend the NSA's offensive strategy. Since Russia and China have an intelligence treaty for sharing such spoils between them when it is to their mutual advantage, it had to be assumed that if either country had acquired the secrets from Snowden, they would be shared between them altering the balance of power between the communication intelligence services of the US and its adversaries.

Following the Snowden breach both China and Russia had immense successes d in breaking through the defenses of US government networks, including the breaches in 2014 and 2015 of U.S. personnel files and background checks. When I asked General Hayden in June 2015 if these successes were made easier by those documents compromised by Snowden, he replied, "Even though I cannot make a direct correlation here, unarguably our adversaries know far more about how we collect signals intelligence than they ever did before [Snowden]."

If Snowden could cause such massive damage, so could other civilian trainees at the NSA. Someone in the chain of command had to take responsibility, General Alexander tendered his resignation on June 30th, 2013. " I'm the director, "he said, falling on his sword. "Ultimately, I'm accountable. " As President Obama did not want the head of the NSA resigning in the midst of the Snowden crisis, he asked him to stay on for another six months. He then appointed Admiral Michael Rogers to be his replacement. Meanwhile, it had become undeniable clear to the Review Committee appointed by President Obama in 2013 that the NSA's own defenses had catastrophically failed. If so, this change was the equivalent of re-arranging the deck chairs on the *S.S. Titanic* after it hit an iceberg.

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PART FOUR

THE GAME OF NATIONS

"I learned that just beneath the surface there's another world, and still different worlds as you dig deeper."

--David Lynch on his 1986 film *Blue Velvet*

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Rise of the NSA

"There are many things we do in intelligence that, if revealed, would have the potential for all kinds of blowback," -- National Intelligence" – James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence

In the Game of Nations, which is played at a level that often is not visible to public scrutiny, the great prize is state secrets that reveal the hidden weaknesses of a nation's potential adversaries. The most important of these in peacetime is communication intercepts. It was just such state secrets that Edward Snowden took from the NSA in the spring of 2013. Before that breach, America's paramount advantage in this subterranean competition was its undisputed dominance in business of obtaining and deciphering the communications of other nations. The NSA was the instrument by which the United States both protected its own secret communications and stole the secrets of foreign nations. The NSA, however, has an Achilles' heel: it is dependent on civilian computer technicians who do not necessarily share its values to operate its complex system. Because of this dependence, it was not able in 2013, as it turned out, to protect its crucial sources and methods.

Snowden exposed this vulnerability when he walked away with, among other documents, the 32,000 page-long country by country descriptions of the gaps in America's coverage of the communications of its adversaries. Even though the Cold War had been declared over after the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century earlier, the age-old enterprise of espionage did not end with it. Russian and China still sought to blunt the edge that the NSA gave the United States. So the Snowden breach cannot be simply looked as an isolated event. It needs to considered in the context of the once and future intelligence war.

The modern enterprise of reading the communications of other nations traces back in the United States to military code-breaking efforts preceding America's entry into the First World War The invention of the radio at the end of the nineteenth century soon provided the means of rapidly sending and getting messages from ships , submarines, ground forces, spies, and embassies. These over-the-air messages could also be intercepted from the ether by adversaries. If they were to remain secret, they could not be sent in plain text. They had to be sent in either code, in which letters are substituted for one another, or, more effectively, cipher, in which numbers are substituted for letters. Making and breaking codes and ciphers became a crucial enterprise for nations. By 1914, the US Army and Navy had set up units, staffed by mathematicians, linguists and crossword puzzle-solvers to intercept and decode enemy messages. After the war had ended in 1918, these units were fused into a cover corporation called the "Code Compilation Company," which moved to new offices on 37th Street and Madison Avenue in New York City. Under the supervision of the famous cryptographer Herbert O Yardley, a team of 20 code-breakers was employed in what was called the "Black Chamber." Yardley arranged for

Western Union, which has the telegraph monopoly in America, to provide the Black Chamber with all the telegrams coming into the United States. “Its far-seeking eyes penetrate the secret conference chambers at Washington, Tokyo, London, Paris, Geneva, Rome,” Yardley wrote about the Black Chamber. “Its sensitive ears catch the faintest whispering in the foreign capitals of the world.” But in 1929, at the instructions of President Herbert Hoover, Secretary of State Henry Stimson closed the Black Chamber saying famously “Gentlemen should not read each other's mail.” The moratorium did not last long. With war looming in Asia and Europe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt reactivated the operation as the Signals Security Agency. It proved its value in breaking the Japanese machine-generated cipher “purple.” In June 1942, using deciphered Japanese messages to pinpoint the location of the Japanese fleet at Midway; America’s won a decisive naval victory in the Pacific. Germany’s Enigma encoding machines, with three encoding wheels, proved more of a challenge. Initially British cryptanalysts led by the brilliant mathematician Alan Turing succeeded in building a rudimentary computer to decipher German messages to its submarines and bombers, but, in 1942, Germany added a fourth set of encoding wheels, escalation what essentially was a battle of machine intelligence. The US Navy then contracted with the National Cash Register Company to build a computing machine capable of breaking the improved Enigma, and, in May 1943, it succeeded. By the time the war ended in 1945, the US had over one hundred giant decryption machines in operation. This unrivalled capability to read the communications of foreign nations, which remained one of America’s most closely guarded secrets, was transferred to the Army Security Agency based at Fort Meade, Maryland. Then, on October 24, 1952, President Harry S. Truman, greatly expanded its purview and changed its name to the National Security Agency.

The NSA was given two missions. The first one was protecting the communications of the US government. The main threat to breaching U.S. government channels of communications was the Soviet. The second one was intercepting all the relevant communications and signals of foreign governments. This latter mandate included the governments of allies as well as enemies. The President, the other intelligence services and the Department of Defense deemed what was relevant for national security. Even though the NSA remained part of the Department of Defense, its job went far beyond providing military intelligence. It also acted as a service agency to other American intelligence services. They prepared shopping lists of foreign communications intelligence and the NSA fulfilled them.

As the Cold War heated up in the 1960s, the NSA provided intelligence not only to the Pentagon but to the Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency, the Treasury Department, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the FBI. With a multi-billion dollar “black budget” hidden from public scrutiny, the NSA’s technology directorate invested in state-of-the-art equipment, including super computers that could break almost any cipher, antennae mounted on geosynchronous satellites that vacuumed in billions of foreign telephone calls and other exotic capabilities. It also devised stealthy means of breaking into channels that its adversaries believed were secure. This enterprise required not only an army of technical specialists capable of remotely intercepting even the faintest traces of electromagnetic signals, hacking into computers, and eavesdropping on distant conversations, but using special units, called "tailored access operations," to plant listening devices in embassies and diplomatic pouches. It also organized elaborate expeditions to penetrate cables in enemy territory. In 1971, for example, the NSA had sent a specially-equipped submarine into Russia's Sea of Okhotsk in Asia to tap through Arctic ice. The target was a Russian cable 400 feet below the surface that connected the Russian naval headquarters in Vladivostok with a missile testing range.

In 1980, President Ronald Reagan, gave the NSA a clear mandate to expand its interception of foreign communications. In Executive Order 12333, he told the NSA to use "all means, consistent with applicable Federal law and (this Executive) order, and with full consideration of the rights of United States persons, shall be used to obtain reliable intelligence information to protect the United States and its interests." It did restrict any foreign country, either an adversary or an ally, from its surveillance.

The NSA's target soon became nothing short of the entire electromagnetic spectrum. "We are approaching a time when we will be able to survey almost any point on the earth's surface with some sensor," Admiral Stansfield Turner, the former Director of Central Intelligence wrote in 1985. "We should soon be able to keep track of most of the activities on the surface of the earth." Bobby Ray Inman, a former director of the NSA and deputy director of the CIA, argued that the "vastness of the [American] intelligence 'take' from the Soviet Union, and the pattern of continuity going back years, even decades," greatly diminished the possibility of Soviet deception so long as the NSA kept secret its sources.

The NSA did not rely entirely on its own sensors for this global surveillance. It also formed intelligence-sharing alliances with key allies the most important was with the British code-breaking service, called the Government Communications Headquarters, or GCHQ, which in World War II had achieved enormous success in using computers to crack the German Enigma cipher. This alliance expanded to include Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, in the so-called Five Eyes Alliance. Since over 80 percent of international phone calls and Internet traffic passed through fiber-optic cables in these five countries, the alliance had the capability of monitoring almost all phone and internet communications. .The NSA also established fruitful liaisons with the cyber-services of Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Israel, Japan, and South Korea, who often were willing to provide the NSA with access to telecommunications links in their countries. These long-term allies greatly strengthened the NSA's hand in other ways in the intelligence war. For example, the so called "James Bond" provision of the British Intelligence Services Act 1994 allowed officers of the GCHQ to commit illegal acts outside of Brittan including planting devices to intercept data from computer servers, cell phones, and other electronic targets. And, as Snowden's release of documents revealed in 2013 and 2014, these foreign allies fully shared their information with the NSA.

Of course, the liaison between the NSA and its allies was a two way street. In 2013, none of these other countries had a global network of geosynchronous sensors in outer space and under the ocean that could monitor signals from missile launching, submarine, military deployments, nuclear tests and other matters of strategic importance to them. Nor did these allies have the cipher-breaking capabilities of the array of NSA super computers. The NSA had assiduously built these means at a cost of over a half trillion dollars and employed tens of thousands of linguists who could translate almost any dialect or language of interest.

Even though these allies had their own ciphers services and local capabilities they depended on NSA to provide them a large share of their signal intelligence. From the perspective of defending themselves from potential threats, the deal that these allies had with NSA was a mutually-advantageous.

The NSA's overseas intelligence gathering was not limited to adversary nations. With the exception of the Five-Eye allies, it gathered data that was deemed of importance by the President and Defense Department in friendly countries. These operations had been approved by every American President, and funded by every American Congress, since 1941. After all, even in the realm of allies, activities take place that run counter to American interests. The 911 conspiracy, for example, was hatched in Hamburg, Germany and financed in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Nor were American allies unaware of the reach of the NSA. "Yes, my continental European friends, we have spied on you. And it is true we use computers to sort through data by using keywords," former CIA Director James Woolsey wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2000, "Have you stopped to ask yourselves what we are looking for?" Whether or not it was appreciated by other countries, the global harvesting of communication intelligence by the NSA was hardly secret.

As the NSA expanded further, it delegated part of its work to regional bases, including ones in Utah, Texas, Hawaii and Japan. The paramount task of the NSA remained monitoring the channels of communications that an adversary might use. The vast proliferation of these channels in cyberspace, which included email, social media, document sharing and other innovations of the Internet age, greatly complicated this task. Even so, this challenge was not insurmountable because most of the Internet actually travelled through fiber-glass land-line cables that crossed the territories of the United States, Britain and Australia. So the NSA found the technical means, including voluntary gaining access to major Internet companies, to "harvest" vast amounts of this Internet data. America's other intelligence agencies quickly recognized the value of the communications intelligence gleaned from foreign telecommunications. John E. McLaughlin, who was the CIA's Acting Director in 2004, described the NSA as nothing less than the "very foundation of US intelligence." This service proceeded from the immense amount of foreign data that the NSA vacuumed in through its global sensors. This data allowed the CIA and other US intelligence services a means for verifying the reports of its human sources as well as discovering new targets in adversary nations for further investigation.

By the first decade of the 21st century, the NSA's surreptitious efforts to render the Internet transparent to US intelligence had earned it a new set of enemies. They were the previously-mentioned hacktavists who were attempting to shield the activities of Internet users from the intrusions of government surveillance. They employed both encryption and TOR software to defeat that surveillance.

The NSA was not about to be defeated by the tactics of amateur privacy advocates. It did not conceal that it was intent on countering any attempt to interfere with its surveillance of the Internet. It built back doors into their encryption and worked to unravel the TOR scrambling of their IP addresses. It made leading hacktavists targets. Brian Hale, the spokesman for the Director of National Intelligence, disclosed that the US routinely intercepted the cyber signatures of parties suspected of hacking into US government networks.

Following the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, the surveillance of the Internet also became an integral part of Bush' administration's war on terrorism. In October 2001, Congress expanded the NSA's mandate by passing the USA Patriot Act. Section 215 of the act directly authorized the NSA, with the approval of the FISA court, to collect and store domestic telephone billing records. The idea was to better coordinate domestic and foreign intelligence about Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. The mantra in government after the 9/11 was to "connect dots." Congress with this back essentially called for demolishing the wall by domestic and foreign intelligence when it came to foreign-directed terrorism. The act effectively made the NSA a partner with the FBI in tracking phone calls made from the phones origination outside the United States by known foreign jihadists. If these calls were made to individuals inside the NSA was now authorized to retrieve the billing records of the person called and those people who he or she called. These traces were then supplied to the FBI. When a *New York Times* expose in 2008 revealing that NSA surveillance has been extended to domestic telephone used, Congress passed the FISA Amendments Act of 2008 explicitly allowing the NSA to continue these practices if it obtained a FISA court order. Congress also sanctioned the NSA's supplying the FBI with the emails and other Internet activity of foreign Jihadists if it was suspected of planning attacks in America. This put the NSA directly in the anti-terrorist business in the United States. It also necessitated the NSA vastly increasing its coverage of the Internet.

The new duties also increased the NSA's need to create new bureaucratic mechanism to monitor its compliance with FISA court orders, Rajesh De, the NSA's General Counsel at the time of the Snowden breach, described the NSA as becoming by 2013 "one of the most regulated enterprises in the world." Grafted onto its intelligence activities were layers of mandated reporting to oversight officials. Not only did the NSA have its own chief compliance officer, chief privacy and civil liberties officer, and independent inspector general but the NSA also had to report to a difference set of compliance officers at the Department of Defense the Office of National intelligence and the Department of Justice On top of reporting to those officials, the Department of Justice dispatched a team of lawyers every 60 days to review the results of "every single tasking decision" approved by the FISA court. According to Rajesh De, just assembling these reports involved thousands of hours of manpower. In addition, the President's Oversight Board required that NSA's Office of the General Counsel and Inspector General supply it every 90 days with a list of every single error made by every NSA employee anywhere in the world deviating from procedures, including even minor typing errors. These requirements, according to De, inundated a large part of the NSA legal and executive staff in a sea of red tape. Yet, this regulation could not undo surveillance programs such as the one Snowden revealed of Verizon turning over the billing records of its custumers to the NSA, because the NSA was in compliance with the FISA court order (even though, as it turned out in 2015, the FISA court may have erred in interpreting the law.)

The NSA's focus on surveillance may have led to the neglect of its second mission: protecting the integrity of the channels through which the White House, government agencies and military units send information. This task had been made vastly more difficult by the proliferation of computer networks, texting and emails in the 21st century. To protect against cyber attacks against government networks, the Pentagon belatedly created the Cyber Command in 2009. In it, the cyber defense units of the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force cyber forces, were merged together in this new command put under the command of the NSA director. NSA director Keith Alexander became the first director of this new command. One problem for the Cyber command was separating attacks by civilians, including criminals, hacktavists and anarchists, from cyber warfare sponsored and supported by adversary states. Since foreign intelligence services often closely imitated the tools of civilian hackers, and were even known to provide them with hacking tools. Even for the Cyber Command, it was not easy challenge to unambiguously determine if the ultimate perpetrator of a cyber attacks was state-sponsored. For example, the identification of North Korea as the principal actor behind the attack on Sony in December 2014 appeared to be a rare success, but many cyber-security experts believed that it might be a false trail used to hide the real attacker. The problem here was that clues can be fabricated in cyber space to point to the wrong party.

The job of the Cyber command was to prevent such an attack. To this end, it planted viruses on hundreds of thousands of computers in private hands to act as sentinels to spot other suspicious viruses that could mount such an attack. So private computers became a new battleground in the cyber was. It also built a capability to retaliate. The problem was that, unlike incoming missiles, cyber attacks which were launched through layers of other country's computers could not be unambiguously traced back to the true perpetrator.

This escalation by the Cyber Command set the stage for expanded forms of warfare in Cyber space. "The Chinese are viewed as the source of a great many attacks on western infrastructure and just recently, the U.S. electrical grid," General Alexander said in explaining the need for this consolidation. "If that is determined to be an organized attack, I would want to go and take down the source of those attacks." The same retaliation would presumably be used against Russia, Iran or any other adversary. Dominance of cyber space itself now became part of the NSA's mandate.

Even so, the most important job of the NSA remained intercepting secret information from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. To this end, it had an annual budget of $12.3 billion and some 35,000 military and civilian employees. In 2012, James Clapper, Jr., the Director of

National Intelligence justified the secret intelligence budget by saying in an open session of Congress, "We are bolstering our support for clandestine SIGINT [signal intelligence] capabilities to collect against high priority targets, including foreign leadership targets," and to develop "groundbreaking cryptanalytic capabilities to defeat adversarial cryptography and exploit Internet traffic." It was no secret, even before Snowden, that the NSA was engaged with monitoring the Internet.

Through all this tumult the heart of the NSA's activity remained its 5,000 acre base at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. It commanded the most powerful mechanism for intercepting communications that the world had ever seen. No other country came close to its technology for intercepting information. The NSA was not only able to intercept secret information from these potential adversaries, but it also, at least not until the Snowden breach, managed to conceal these means from them. As long as these adversaries remained blind to the ways in which its communications were being intercepted, deciphered and read by the NSA, they could not take effective countermeasures. Consequently, he NSA had the capability to provide the President and his advisers with continuous insights into the thinking and planning of potential enemies.

Keeping its sources and methods secrets was no easy task. The NSA's technicians had to deal with continuous technical challenges to provide a seamless harvesting of data from a wide range of communication devices, including telephones, computers and the Internet. It required continuous intra-agency communications between the NSA's own intelligence officers and a growing number of civilian technicians. It even had its own "Wiki-style" network through which they could discuss problems, called the NSANet. As it could not tightly control access to this technical network, it expunged any mention of the sources and methods from the material circulated on the classified NSA network. Instead, it stored them in discrete computers, called compartments that were disconnected from other computers at the NSA. These compartments could only be accessed by a limited number of analysts and NSA executives who had a need to know about the data they contained. These compartments were the final line of defense against an inside intruder.

In 2009, Snowden found his way into the NSA through a temporary job with an outside contractor that had a contract with the NSA's Technology Directorate to repair and update it back-up system. Four years later, by maneuvering to get hired by another outside contractor with access to the NSA's sources and methods, he was able to steal secrets stored in isolated computers bearing directly on the ongoing intelligence war. Snowden also copied from these compartments in a matter of weeks, as has been previously mentioned, the NSA's Level 3 sources and methods used against Russia, Iran and China. The Snowden breach demonstrated that the NSA's envelope of secrecy was at best illusory.

After this immense loss, the NSA's sources inside these adversary countries were largely compromised even if they were not closed down. Once these adversaries were in a position to know what channels the NSA was intercepting, they could use these same channels to mislead US intelligence. A former top intelligence official told me “The queen on our chessboard had been taken.”

To be sure, even after the loss of its “queen,” the game was not lost. The NSA moved to mitigate the damage and find new ways of obtaining unexpected intelligence. In June 2014, the new NSA director Admiral Michael Rogers had to confront flagging morale that, according to former director Michael Hayden, was near-paralyzing the intelligence service. Admiral Rogers recognized that as a direct result of the Snowden breach “the nation has lost capabilities against adversaries right now who are attempting to actively undermine us." But even with that loss, he observed “the sky has not fallen.” As in the Chicken Little fable he cited, the world had not ended for the NSA. Nor had it ended for the multi-billion out-sourcing enterprise it superintended. The NSA may have lost many of its sources, or “capabilities,” but Rogers held out hope that new sources could be eventually found to replace them. Compromised codes, after all, could be changed. New technological methods could be devised. New vulnerabilities also could be targeted in enemy territories. Although repairing the damage might take many “decades.” according to Michael McConnell, the Vice Chairman of Booz Allen, the new director had to get on with that task. McConnell, a former NSA director himself, pointed out that the NSA Director’s “first responsibility is to be the chief cheerleader." Rebuilding the NSA capabilities assumed, however, that there would not be another Snowden-size breach.

The question remained: how could the NSA’s vaunted secrecy have been so deeply penetrated by a mere analyst-in-training at a regional base in Oahu? The perpetrator himself could not be asked. He was in Moscow, supposedly employed by an unnamed Russian cyber security firm. He was also in his Moscow interviews pointing to the “incompetence” of the NSA. All that was known for certain about the young man who had taken the “queen” from the board was that he had gained entry to the NSA’s secret chambers through the back door, a portal opened to him by the NSA’s reliance on outside contractors.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The NSA's Back Door

"You have private for-profit companies doing inherently governmental work like targeted espionage, surveillance, compromising foreign systems. And there's very little oversight, there's very little review."

- Edward Snowden, explaining his access to the NSA in Moscow, 2014

Prior to Snowden's theft of NSA documents, the single most shattering blow to the confidence of the US intelligence community was the exposure of Aldrich Ames as a long-serving Russian mole in the CIA in 1994. Ames, it will be recalled, had been a high-ranking CIA officer. He had even worked at the CIA's Counterintelligence Center Analysis Group before he was arrested by the FBI. He had also worked as a mole for Russian intelligence. (His recruitment by the KGB will be further discussed in Chapter twenty-seven.)

In a plea bargain to avoid the death sentence, he admitted that he had successfully burrowed into the CIA for over nine years on behalf of the KGB. His description of his *sub rosa* activities as a mole was part of the plea bargain. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. This stunning revelation shook the CIA leadership to its core. Up until then, as mentioned earlier, CIA executives steadfastly denied that it was possible that the KGB could sustain a mole in American intelligence. The Ames arrest also led the NSA to reassess its own vulnerability to penetration. Could there be an Ames inside the NSA?

The question was considered by the NSA's National Threats Operations Center, the same unit from which Edward Snowden later stole a huge trove of secret documents. According to a report in 1996 entitled "Out of Control" (later released by the NSA), the danger of an Ames-type penetration could not be excluded. Even though the "threat officer" who wrote this report was not identified by name, his analysis proved incredibly prescient. He said that the NSA's drive to enhance its performance by networking its computers would result in the intelligence services, putting "all their classified information 'eggs' into one very precarious basket." The basket was the computer networks run by technicians called: system administrators." He pointed out that the NSA was becoming increasingly dependent on such networked computer systems, and he predicted that the NSA's "Aldrich Ames." As he put it, would be a "system administrator"—which was the position that Edward Snowden held nearly two decades later at Dell when he began stealing secrets.

The NSA's system administrators were, as the threat officer pointed out, very different from the traditional military employees at the NSA. They were usually civilians, who effectively served as repair-men for complex computer systems at the NSA. Moreover, many of them had not been directly hired by the NSA. Instead, their recruitment had been privatized to outside contractors.

This outsourcing had deep roots tracing back to the Second World War Ed Booz, the founder of Booz Allen Hamilton, obtained contracts to help manage ship construction from the US Navy. After the war ended he sought contracts for his firm in classified work. These contracts grew in size as the NSA needed more and more system administrators and other information technologists to manage the computer networks. These system administrators needed to be given special privileges to do their service job. One such privilege allowed them to bypass password protection. Another privilege allowed then to temporarily transfer data to an external storage device while they repaired computers. These two privileges greatly increased the risk of a massive breach. Seeing them as the weak link if the chain, the threat officer wrote in the report that "system administrators are likely to be increasingly targeted by foreign intelligence services because of their special access to information."

Before the computerization of the NSA, the threat officer noted that code clerks and other low-level NSA communicators had been the target of adversary intelligence services. But the increasing reliance on computer technicians presented foreign intelligence services with much richer targets. He predicted that they would adapt their recruiting to this new reality. Specifically, he argued that adversary intelligence services would now focus their attention on system administrators. "With system administrators," he said, "the situation is potentially much worse than it has ever been with communicators." The reason: "System administrators can so easily, and quickly, steal vast quantities of information."

He further suggested that since system administrators are often drawn from counterculture of hacking, they are more likely to be vulnerable to an adversary service using a fake identity for its approach, or a "false flag." A "false flag" was a term originally applied to pirate ship that temporarily hoisted any flag that would allow it to gain close proximity to its intended prey but it modern times describes a technique employed by espionage service to surreptitiously lure a prospect. As will be more fully discussed in the next chapter, false flags were a staple used by the KGB in espionage recruitments during the Cold War. They were usually employed when a target for recruitment was not ideologically disposed to assisting the intelligence service. To overcome that problem, recruiters hide their true identities and adopt a more sympathetic bogus one. In 1973, for example, the KGB, working through one of its agents in the US Navy, used the false flag of Israel, to recruit Jerry Alfred Whitworth, who served as a communications officer with a top secret clearance for the Navy. Like many other KGB recruits, Whitworth came from a broken family, dropped out of a high school, took technical courses and got a job as a communications officer. He was not disposed to working for Russia. But he was willing to steal enciphered and plain text cables to help in the defense of Israel. After he was thoroughly compromised by his espionage work, he was told by the KGB recruiter that he was actually working for Russia, but, by this time, he was too deeply compromised to quit. He continued his espionage work for another 8 years. (Whitworth, who was arrested by the FBI in 1985, was convicted of espionage and sentenced to 365 years in prison.)

The Internet provided an almost ideal environment for false flags since its users commonly adopt aliases, screen names, and other avatars. The threat officer explained how easy it would be for the KGB to adapt such a false flag when dealing with a dissident system administrator working for US intelligence. As the threat officer pointed out in his report, the KGB had used false flags in the late 1980s to surreptitiously recruit members of the "German Hanover Hackers," a community of anarchistic hackers who breached computer networks for fun and profit. Up until then, these hacktavists stole corporate and private passwords, credit card information, and other privileged documents as a form of freelance espionage. Because of their fervent anti-authority ideology, the KGB disguised its recruiters as fellow hacktavists. The KGB succeeded in getting the Hanover hackers to steal log-in account identifications, source codes and other information from U.S. government computer networks.

The precise vulnerability that this threat officer pointed out in 1996 was system administrators. This weak link became increasingly relevant as the NSA moved further into the digital age. By the beginning of the 21st century, its growing networks of computers were largely run by civilian technicians, including system administrators, infrastructure analysts, and information technologists, who were need to keep the system running. Despite the warning by the threat officer, the NSA became more reliant on these outsiders as it reorganized to meet its new mandates for surveillance of the Internet in the war on terrorism. Since the NSA had to compete with technology companies, such as Google, Apple and Facebook, for the services of experienced IT workers, it used private contractors to find them. They, in turn, recruited civilian technicians from many unconventional areas, including the hacking culture. Ex-hackers, who lacked (or shunned) employment opportunities in the corporate sector, were suitable candidates for the system administrator jobs that these films had contracted to supply the NSA. In the rush to expand, little heed was paid to the 1996 warning that this hacking culture might provide a portal to anti-government hacktavist groups. The NSA became so enamored with this new technology that it neglected the security implications of employing outsiders, "All of us just fell in love with the ease and convenience and scale [of electronic storage]", Michael Hayden, who headed the NSA at the time, said to the *Wall Street Journal* in 2015. "So we decided to take things we used to keep if not in a safe, at least in our desk drawer, and put it up here [in a computer network], where it's by definition more vulnerable." Making matters even worse, as has been previously discussed, the NSA stripped away much of the so-called stove-piping that insulated highly-sensitive data from the NSA's other computer networks. Here they were merely following the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission to make their data more accessible to other agencies concerned with potential terrorist attacks. As a result, the inner sanctum of the NSA became more opened to its new army of civilian technicians.

The universe of independent contractors was governed by very different forces than that of intelligence services. By 2013, much of the job of managing the NSA's classified computers had been handed over to five private companies: Booz Allen Hamilton, which handled the most highly secret work; and Dell SecureWorks, Microsoft, Raytheon, and IBM. In many respects, these five companies acted less like management consultants and more like temporary employment agencies in finding for the NSA the computer specialists, who had the necessary security clearances. Unlike intelligence services, their fate depended on turning profits. Since the value of their contracts was largely limited by competitive bidding, their business plans were predicated on their ability to minimize the costs of fulfilling these contracts. Their principal cost was the salaries they paid their independent contractors. Their business plans therefore depended on finding large numbers of computer technicians in the private realm willing to work at a NSA base at relatively-low wages. This task became more difficult as many potential recruits could find higher paying employment with more of a future in the burgeoning private sphere. They could also increase their revenue streams by getting additional contracts which, in turn, meant recruiting even more workers. It was hardly a business plan which could afford to give priority to quality control. In the private sector, there is usually an unambiguous external measure of failure. For example, for an automobile company such as General Motors can measure the performance of its executive by reckoning it change in net income. With secret intelligence work, the metrics for failure are far less clear. This curious aspect of secret work was part of the advice given to White House lawyer in the Obama Administration seeking a position with the NSA in 2012, He was advised that among the advantages of working for a super-secret agency was that if one errs or has a failure. "It stays secret." He later found out in the Snowden case which exploded during his tenure at the NSA, that not all failures stay secret.

Even so, the NSA cannot always find convenient metrics to measures its own failures. For example, it can quantify the amount of data it is intercepting, it cannot count the intelligence it misses. There is no getting around the *a priori* proposition in the intelligence game: "what is successfully hidden is never found." But there is a failure that cannot be hidden: a security breach in which a perpetrator uses NSA data to publically expose the NSA's sources. Up until the Snowden breach in 2013, the NSA had had experienced only one such a public failure. It was the capture by North Korea in 1968 of the USS Pueblo, which had been carrying out highly-sensitive electronic communications interception for the NSA. Because the Pueblo crew failed to destroy the NSA's encoding machines, which several days were flown to Russia. The stakes were so high that the Pentagon even considered using nuclear weapons to limit the damage of the seizure. The Snowden breach was much worse because, among the thousands of documents he stole, he selected lists of the NSA's secret sources in adversary nations. Making matters worse, the Snowden breach was a failure that directly traced back to Booz Allen Hamilton, the NSA's largest contractor.

Such a failure calls into question the vexing issue of privatizing secret intelligence. Booz Allen, like all other outside contractors, was in the business to make money. Indeed, it had found government contracts so much more profitable than its work in the private sector that it sold its private sector unit to Price Waterhouse. The profitability of government work led the Carlyle group's hedge fund to acquire a controlling stake in Booz Allen in July 2008. By 2013, it had increased its revenue by $1.3 billion by expanding its government contracts. Even more impressive, its operating margin on these contracts had doubled. As it turned out, it did not achieve these profits by increasing its core internal staff. In 2008, it had 22,000 employees on its internal staff, and in 2013, it had roughly the same number on its internal staff. What it expanded was the number of outside contractors it employed. It added in these five years, by one Wall Street analyst's calculation, some 8,000 new external workers. They were employed as system administrators, infrastructure analysts, computer security specialists and other "geek squad" jobs at the NSA and other government agencies. Their main qualification was their prior secrecy clearances (which saved Booz Allen the expense of vetting them and also the loss income while waiting many months for a clearance.) Snowden therefore was highly-desirable from an economic point of view for Booz Allen. Even though he had no prior experience as an infrastructure analyst, and he had been detected being untruthful about his degree in computer sciences, he not only had a SCI secrecy clearance, but he was willing to take a cut in pay. In keeping with the Booz Allen business plan, such a recruit would provide another cog in its profit machine.

Not only had the NSA outsourced much of its computer operations to private companies but the Clinton Administration in 1996 had privatized background checks for government employees requiring security clearances. The idea backed by Vice President Al Gore was to reduce the size of the Federal government by outsourcing investigating the backgrounds of millions of government applicants for jobs. The task had been previously been performed by FBI but it was assumed that a profit-making business could do it faster and more efficiently. The private company named United States Investigative Services (USIS) was purchased in 2007 for $1.5 billion by Providence Equity Partners, a rapidly-expanding investment firm founded only four years earlier by graduates of Brown University and the Harvard Business School. So like Booz Allen, USIS was backed by a hedge-fund determined to make money by systematically cutting the cost of a previously government service. But such outsourcing had drawbacks. For one thing, unlike the FBI, USIS lacked the investigative clout to gain entry to other the CIA and other government agencies. For example, when it did the background check on Snowden in 2011, it could not get access to his CIA file. As will be recalled, there was a "derog" in his file that might have set off alarm bells. But because of its lack of access to the CIA, USIS did not learn about the derogatory reports in Snowden's CIA file. Nor did it learn that he had been threatened by an internal investigation of his alleged computer tampering in 2009. The FBI, with its long standing liaisons with the CIA, might have learned this about Snowden if it had done his background check.

To be sure, the profit calculus might have worked better if it had been coupled with adequate oversight. But without such oversight, it proved to be a barrier to extended investigations of applicants. As it turned out, USIS closed cases and cleared applicants without completing an adequate investigation. According to a US government suit filed in 2014, USIS had prematurely closed over 665,000 investigations in order to get more quickly paid for them. Since the more cases it completes each month, the more money it receives from the government, the law suit alleged that USIS employees often “flushed,” or ended cases before completing a full investigation, to meet corporate-imposed quotas for getting bonuses. One employee said in an email cited in the government’s complaint “Flushed everything like a dead goldfish.” As a result, some of information specialists entering the NSA through the back door of outside contractors were not fully vetted. (On August 20, 2015 USIS agreed to forfeit $30 million in fees to settle the law suit.)

USIS was also opened to sophisticated hacking attacks by outsiders. For example, in August 2014, the Department of Homeland Security’s counterintelligence unit discovered such a massive and persistent breach in USIS that it shut down its entire exchange of data with USIS. The intrusion into USIS records in this case was attributed to hackers in China most likely linked to the Chinese intelligence service. Such massive intrusions dated back to 2011. USIS’ lack of security in its website left a gaping hole through which outside parties, including Chinese and Russian hackers, could learn both the identity and background of information specialists applying for jobs at the NSA.

These private companies had one further security weakness. They did sufficiently protect the personal data of their off-premise employees working at the NSA. Consider, for example, the successful 2011 attack on the Booz Allen Hamilton servers. The previously-mentioned hackers' group “Anonymous” took credit for it. It not only breached the security of Booz Allen servers but cracked the algorithms it used to protect its employees. It next injected so-called Trojan-horse viruses and other malicious codes on Booz Allen servers that allowed it to have future entry. Presumably, if amateur hackers such as Anonymous could break into the computers of the NSA’s largest contractor, so could the state espionage services with far more advanced hacking tools such as those of Russia and China. From these sites, an adversary intelligence service could obtain all the job applications and personal resumes submitted to contractors such as Booz Allen. It could then compile a list of the candidates looking to work at the NSA.

These deficiencies in the private sector were compounded by the failure of security in the government’s own Office of Personnel Management. It used a computer system called E-QIP in which intelligence employees with security clearances, including outside contractors, updated their computerized records to maintain or upgrade their security clearances. For example, Snowden updated his clearance in 2011. To do so, these employees constantly updated their financial and personal information. As it turned out, there was a major hole in the E-QIP system. It was repeatedly hacked since 2010 by unknown parties. In 2015, the US government told Congress that China was most likely responsible but Russia and other nations with sophisticated cyber services could have also participated in the hacking. In any case, the records of over 19 million employees, including intelligence workers, became available to a hostile intelligence service. This breach would allow hostile services a great deal of information about independent contractors working at the NSA. They could then use this data to follow the movements of movement of any of these intelligence workers they deemed of interest.

Despite all the potential flaws in it, the outsourcing system, ii seemed to work until 2013. It even featured a revolving door through which Booz Allen, for example, hired retiring executives from the intelligence services, such as ex-NSA director Michael McConnell, R. James Woolsey, a former director of CIA, and Lieutenant General James Clapper (ret), who later served as Director of National Intelligence.

The cozy relationship between the private firms and the NSA notwithstanding, the NSA leadership was unaware that outsourcing could create a security problem. As far back as 2005, Michael Hayden, then the departing head of the NSA, had been warned of one such vulnerability in a memorandum written by a counter-intelligence officer at the NSA. Like the earlier 1995 report by the threat officer, this memorandum noted the NSA had ceded responsibility for managing its secret systems to outsiders, and warned that the NSA's reliance on them to manage its computers had opened a back-door into the NSA. In addition, it warned that once an outside contractor managed to slip in through this back door, he could easily jump from one outsourcer to another. This was what Snowden did when he moved from Dell to Booz Allen Hamilton in 2013.

Despite its security flaws, outsourcing provided a number of advantages to the NSA. For one thing, it provided a means for circumventing the budget restrictions imposed by Congress on hiring new employees. In addition, since private companies had less-rigid hiring standards, it greatly expanded the pool of young system administrators by tapping into computer cultures that would be antagonistic to working directly for the government. Finally, it used less NSA resources. Since these information technologists were only temporary employees, they were not entitled to military pensions, medical leave and other benefits. It was a system which effectively replaced military careerists with free-lancers.

The irony of the situation was that the NSA had surrounded its front doors with rings of barbwire, close-circuit cameras, and armed guards, but for reasons of economy, bureaucratic restrictions and convenience, it had left the back door of outsourcing opened to temporary employees of private companies. To be sure, it might take some time for them to gain entry to its inner sanctum. "It was not a question of if but when one of the contractors would go rogue," the former NSA executive who wrote the memorandum told me. Snowden answered that question in 2013 by stealing a vast number of files while working for both Dell and Booz Allen. Even more extraordinary than the theft itself was the reaction to it by the NSA. It turned out that there was not cost of failure levied against the outside contractor, Booz Allen, which employed Snowden when he bypassed its security regime to steal the keys to the kingdom. Even though the counterintelligence investigation showed Snowden stole documents from compartments to which he did not have access, the NSA did not penalize his employer, Booz Allen, even though the NSA was set back for decades according even to Michael McConnell, the vice chairman of Booz Allen. Instead, its revenues and profits from government contracts markedly increase between 2013 and 2015.

Nor did the NSA alter its reliance on private contractors. The Snowden breach notwithstanding, the back door to the NSA remained wide opened because by the time of Snowden outsourcing to private companies had become an all but irreplaceable part of the intelligence system in America.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Russians Are Coming

"The breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century."—Vladimir Putin

In the first invasion of a European country since the end of the Cold War, Russian military forces moved into the Crimea and other parts of Eastern Ukraine in February and March of 2014. Unlike with previous Russian troop movements, such as those into Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Eastern Germany during the Cold War, the week-long massing of Russian elite troops and sophisticated equipment for the move into Ukraine almost totally evaded detection by the NSA's surveillance. It failed to pick up tell-tale signs of the impending invasion. Never before had the NSA's multibillion dollar armada of sensors and other apparatus for intercepting signals missed such a massive military operation. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* that cited Pentagon sources, Russian units had managed to hide all electronic traces of its elaborate preparations. If so, after more than a half-century of attempted penetrations, Russia apparently had found a means of stymieing the interception capabilities of the NSA.

While American political scientists wrote optimistically about the end of history, Putin had his own ideas about restoring Russia's power in the post-Cold War. A formidable KGB officer before he became President of the Russian Federation in 2000, he made no secret that his goal was to prevent the United States from obtaining what he termed "global hegemony." His logic was clear. He judged the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 to be as, as he put it, "a geopolitical tragedy." He argued that the break-up had provided the United States with the means to become the singular dominant power in the world. He sought to prevent that feared outcome by moving aggressively to redress this loss of Russian power. He upgraded Russia's nuclear force, modernized Russia's elite military units and greatly strengthened Russia's relations with China. The last measure was essential since China was Russia's principle ally in opposing the extension of American dominance. Yet, there was still an immense gap between it and the United States in communications intelligence.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the NSA had continued to build up its technologically capabilities while those of Russia, which teetered on the edge of collapse in the early 1990s. But the NSA also had its problems. As previously mentioned, the NSA's legal mandate had been limited by Congress to foreign interceptions (at least prior to 9/11 in 2001.) As a result, it was required to separate out domestic from foreign surveillance, a massive process which was not only time-consuming but could generate dissidence within the ranks of American intelligence. It also could not legally use its surveillance machinery to monitor the telephones and Internet activities of the tens of thousands of civilian contractors who ran its computer networks—at least not unless the FBI began an investigation into them. Here the Russian intelligence services had a clear advantage. They had a lawful mandate to intercept any and all domestic communications, In fact, a compulsory surveillance system called by its Russian acronym SORM had been incorporated into Russian law in 1995. It requires the FSB and seven other Russian security agencies to monitor all forms of domestic communications including telephones (SORM 1), emails and other Internet activity (SORM-2), and computer data storage of billing information (SORM-3). Not only did Russia run a nationwide system of Internet-filtering in 2013, but it requires their telecommunication companies furnish to it worldwide data.

The NSA also had to deal with many peripheral issues other than the activities of Russia and China. It was charged with monitoring everything from nuclear proliferation in Iran, Pakistan, and North Korea, to potential jihadist threats everywhere in the world. The Russian intelligence service, on the other hand, could put its limited resources to work on redressing the gap with its main enemy: the United States.

Nevertheless, Putin had to reckon with the reality in 2013 that Russia could not compete with the NSA in the business of intercepting communications. And if the NSA could listen in on all the internal activities of its spy agencies and security regime, the ability of Putin to use covert means to achieve his other global ambitions would be impaired. In the Cold Peace that replaced the Cold War, Russia had little hope of realizing these ambitions unless it could weaken the NSA's iron-tight grip on global communications intelligence. One way to remedy the imbalance between Russian intelligence and the NSA was via espionage. Here the SVR would be the instrument and the immediate objective would be to acquire the NSA's lists of its sources in Russia. If successful, it would be a game changer.

Such an ambitious penetration of the NSA, to be sure, was a tall order for Russian intelligence. Most of its moles recruited in the NSA by the KGB, had been code clerks, guards, translators, and low-level analysts. They provided documents about the NSA's cipher-breaking, but they lacked access to these lists of the NSA's sources and methods

These meager results did not inhibit Russian efforts. Yet, for almost seven decades, ever since the inception of the NSA in 1952, the Russian Intelligence service had engaged in a covert war with the NSA. The Russian intelligence service is, as far as is known, the only intelligence service in the world that ever succeeded in penetrating the NSA. A number of NSA employees also defected to Moscow. The history of this venerable enterprise is instructive.

The first two defectors in the NSA's history were William Martin and Bernon Mitchell. They were mathematicians working on the NSA's decryption machines who went to Moscow via Cuba in 1960. The Russian intelligence service, then called the KGB, went to great lengths to publicize their defections. It even organized a 90-minute long press conference for them on September 6, 1960 at the Hall of Journalists and invited to it all the foreign correspondents in Moscow. Before television cameras, the defectors proceeded to denounce the NSA's activities. Martin told how the NSA breached international laws by spying on Germany, Britain and other NATO allies. Mitchell, for his part, suggested that the NSA's practice of breaking international laws could ignite a nuclear war. Indeed, he justified their joint defection to Russia in heroic whistle-blowing terms, saying, "We would attempt to crawl to the moon if we thought it would lessen the threat of an atomic war." The NSA historian assessed little damage had been done since the NSA quickly could change the codes they compromised. He noted: "The Communist spymasters would undoubtedly have preferred Martin and Mitchell to remain in place as moles, since their information was dated as of the moment they left NSA."

The next NSA defector was Victor Norris Hamilton. He was a translator and analyst at the NSA. He arrived in Moscow in 1962 and, like Mitchell and Martin, he claimed the status of a whistle-blower. This time KGB provided a newspaper platform. Writing in the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, Hamilton revealed the extent of US spying on its allies in the Middle East.

None of these three 1960s defectors revealed what, if any, NSA secret documents that they had compromised. Nor did any of them ever return to the United States. Martin changed his name to Vladimir Sokolodsky, married a Russian woman, and died in Mexico City on January 17, 1987. Mitchell vanished from sight and was reported to have died in St. Petersburg on November 12, 2001. Hamilton, after telling Russian authorities stories about hearing voices in his head because of a NSA device implanted in his brain, was consigned to Special Psychiatric Hospital No. 5 outside of Moscow.

There were also KGB spies in the NSA who were caught or died before they could defect. One of them was Sgt. Jack Dunlap. He was found dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in his garage on July 23, 1963. Although there was no note, his death was ruled an apparent suicide. NSA classified documents later was discovered in his house. After that, NSA investigators unraveled his decade-long career as a KGB mole. Dunlap had been recruited by the KGB in Turkey in 1952. The standard KGB tool kit for recruitment was called MICE. It stood for Money, Ideology, Compromise and Exploitation. The KGB used the first element, money, to compromise Dunlap. After he was compromised, it exploited him by getting him to steal NSA secrets. He had access to such secrets because he became the personal driver first to Major General Garrison Coverdale, the chief of staff of the NSA. After Coverdale retired, he next became the driver for his successor, General Thomas Wattlington. These positions afforded him a secrecy clearance and, even more important, a "no inspection" status for the commanding General's cars that he drove. This perk allowed him to leave the base with secret documents, have them photocopied by his KGB case officer, and then return them to the files at the NSA base before anyone else knew they were missing. He also used, likely at the suggestion of the KGB case officers, his "no inspection" perk to offer other NSA employees a way of earning money. He would smuggle off the base any items of government property off the base that they took. Once he had compromised them through thefts, he was in a position ask them for intelligence favors. This NSA ring could not be fully investigated because of his untimely death. Other than the packets of undelivered NSA documents found in his home, the investigation was never able to assess the total extent of the KGB penetration of NSA secrets. (Angleton suspected Dunlap was murdered the KGB, in what he termed a surreptitiously assisted death, to prevent Dunlap from talking to investigators.)

The Russian intelligence services continued recruiting mercenary spies in the NSA for the duration of the Cold War. The KGB successes included Robert Lipka, a clerk at the NSA in the mid 1960s, who was caught in a sting operation by the FBI and sentenced to 18 years in a federal prison. Ronald Pelton, an NSA analyst, was recruited after he retired from the NSA. After he was betrayed by a KGB double agent in 1985, was sentenced to life imprisonment, Finally, there was David Sheldon Boone, a NSA code clerk, who between 1988 and 1992, provided the KGB with NSA documents in return for $60,000. Boone, sentenced to 24 years in prison, was the last known KGB recruitment of the Cold War.

During the Cold War, Russian Intelligence Service officers operated mainly under the cover of the embassies, consulates, United Nations delegations and other diplomatic missions of the Soviet Union. As "diplomats," they were protected from arrest by the terms of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Their diplomatic cover greatly limited, however, their universe for finding potential recruits outside of their universe of international meetings, diplomatic receptions, UN organizations, scientific conferences and cultural exchanges. They therefore tended to recruit their counterparts in adversary services.

In this regard, the successful entrapment of Harold Nicholson in the 1990s is highly instructive. From his impressive record, he seemed an unlikely candidate for recruitment. He had been a super-patriotic American who had served as a captain in Army intelligence before joining the CIA in 1980. In the CIA, he had an unblemished record as a career officer, serving as a station chief in Eastern Europe and then the deputy chief of operation in Malaysia in 1992. Even though his career was on the rise and he was a dedicated anti-Communist, he became a target for SVR when he was assigned to the CIA's elite Russian division. Since the job of this division was to recruit Russian officials working abroad as diplomats, engineers and military officers, its operations brought its officers in close contact with SVR officers. Nicholson therefore was required to meet with Russian intelligence officers in Manila, Bucharest, Tokyo and Bangkok and "dangle" himself to the SVR by pretending disloyalty to the CIA. As part of these deception operations, he supplied the Russians with tidbits of CIA secrets, or "chickenfeed," that had been approved by his superiors at the CIA. What his CIA superiors did not fully take into account in this spy versus spy game was the SVR's ability to manipulate, compromise, and convert a "dangle" to its own ends. As it turned out, Russian intelligence had been assembling a psychological profile on Nicholson since the late 1980s, and found vulnerability: his resentment at the failure of his superiors to recognize his achievements in intelligence. It played on this vulnerability to compromise him and then converted him to becoming its mole inside the CIA. He worked for the SVR first in Asia then at the CIA headquarters at Langley, where he was given a management position. Among other secret documents, he provided the SVR with the identities of CIA officers sent to the CIA's special training school at Fort Peary, Virginia, which opened up the door for the SVR to make other potential recruitments. Meanwhile, it paid him $300,000 before he was finally arrested by the FBI in November 1996. (After his conviction for espionage, he was sentenced to 23 years in Federal prison.) The CIA post mortem on Nicholson, who was the highest-ranking CIA officer ever recruited (as far as is known), made clear that even a loyal American, with no intention of betraying the United States, could be entrapped in the spy game.

When it comes to recruiting moles in a larger universe, intelligence services operate much like highly-specialized corporate "headhunters," as James Jesus Angleton described the process to me during the Cold War era. He was referring to the similar approach that corporate human resource divisions had with espionage agencies. Both "head hunt" by searching through a database of possible candidates for possible recruits to fill specific positions. Both type organizations have at their disposal researchers to draw up rosters of potential recruits. Both sort through available data bases to determine which of the names on the list have attributes that might qualify, or disqualify, them for a recruitment pitch. Both also collect personal data on each qualified candidate, including any indication of their ideological leaning, political; affiliations, financial standing, ambitions, and vanities, to help them make a tempting offer. But there are two important differences. First, unlike their counterparts in the private sectors, espionage headhunters ask their candidates not only to take on a new job with them but to keep their employment secret from their present employer. Second, they ask them to surreptitiously steal documents from him. Since they are asking candidates to break the law, espionage services, unlike their corporate counterparts in headhunting, obviously need to initially hide from the candidate the dangerous nature of the work they will do. Depending on the preferences of the targeted recruit, they might disguise the task as a heroic act, such as righting an injustice, exposing an illegal government activity, countering a regime of tyranny, or some other noble purpose. This disguise is called in the parlance of the trade a "false flag." By using such a false flag, the SVR did not need to find candidate who were sympathy to Russia, or the Putin regime. In its long history dating back to the era of the Czars, Russian intelligence had perfected the technique of false flag recruitment through which it assumes an identity to fit the ideological bent of a potential recruit.

Russian intelligence was well-experienced with false flags. It first used this technique following the Bolshevik revolution in 1918 to control dissidents both at home and abroad. The centerpiece, as later analyzed by the CIA, was known as the "Trust" deception. It began in August 1921 when a high-ranking official of the Communist regime in Russia named Aleksandr Yakushev, slipped away from a Soviet trade delegation in Estonia and sought out a leading anti-Communist exile he had known before the revolution in Russia. He then told him that he represented a group of disillusioned officials in Russia that included key members of the secret police, army, and interior ministry. Yakushev said that they all had come to the same conclusion: the Communist experiment in Russia had totally failed and needed to be replaced. To effect this regime change, they had formed an underground organization code-named the "Trust" because the cover for their conspiratorial activities was the Moscow headquarters of the Municipal Credit Association, which was a trust company. According to Yakushev's account, it had had become by 1921 the equivalent of a de facto government,

The exile leader in Estonia reported this astonishing news to British intelligence which, along with French and American intelligence, helped fund this newly-emerged anti-Communist group. Initially British intelligence had doubts about the bona fides of the Trust. So did other Western intelligence services sponsoring exile groups. But they gradually accepted it after they received intelligence reports confirming its operations from many other sources, including Russian officials, diplomats, and military officers who claimed to have defected from the Soviet government in Moscow. Since these reports all dove-tailed, they recognized the Trust as a real underground organization.

Once the Trust had been established in the minds of the Western intelligence services, it offered them as well as exile groups the services of its network of collaborators. These services included smuggling out dissidents, stealing secret documents, and disbursing money inside Russia to sympathizers. Within a year, exile groups in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Helsinki were using the "Trust" to deliver arms and supplies to their partisans inside Russia. The Trust also furnished spies and exile leader's fake passports which allowed them to sneak back into Russia to participate in clandestine missions. It even undertook sabotage and assassination missions paid for by Western intelligence services. As they saw with their own eyes police stations blown up and political prisoners escape from prisons, these agents and dissidents came to further believe in the power of the Trust.

By the mid-1920s, no fewer than eleven Western intelligence services had become almost completely dependent on the Trust for information about Russia. They also sent millions of dollars into Russia via couriers to finance its activities.

But suddenly exile leaders working in Russia under the aegis of the Trust began to vanish. Then top western intelligence agents, such as Sydney Reilly and Boris Savinkov were arrested, and their networks were eliminated. Instead of the Communist regime collapsing, as the Trust had predicted, it consolidated its power and wiped out all the dissident groups. Finally, in 1929, the Trust was revealed by a defector to be a long-term false flag operation run by the Russian intelligence service. Even the Trust building, rather than being the cover for a subversive conspiracy, was the headquarters for the Russian secret police during this seven-year operation. The secret police had provided the documents fed to Western intelligence, briefed the agents who pretended to defect, published the dissident newspapers the Trust distributed, fabricated the passport it supplied exiles, blew up Russian buildings and staged jail breaks to make the deception more credible. It also collected the money sent in by Western intelligence services, which more than paid for the entire deception. Since it was running the show, it could offer those lured into the trap an opportunity to work for it as double-agents. The alternative, if they refused, was to face a firing squad.

Even after the "Trust" itself had been fully exposed, The Russian Intelligence Service continued to succeed with other false-flag deception, During the Cold War, for example, it set up a fake underground in Poland modeled on the Trust. It was called WIN. It also set up other false flag groups in Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Albania, and Hungary. It also had agents masquerade as members of the security services of Israel, South Africa, Germany, France and the US to recruit unwitting agents. These deceptions became an integral part of the recruitments of the Russian intelligence services.

Penetrating the NSA and getting access to files from its stove-piped computers was a far more difficult challenge for the SVR. Approaching CIA officers, such as Nicholson, was relatively easy because it was part of the CIA officer's job to meet with their adversaries. NSA officers, on the other hand, did not engage in "dangles" or even attend diplomatic receptions. They had not reason, other than a sinister one, to meet with a member of the Russian intelligence service. Furthermore, unlike CIA officers who, like Nicholson, are often posted in neutral countries where they can be approached in a social context, NSA officers worked at well-guarded regional bases and are not part of the diplomatic life. Since a known employee of a foreign diplomatic mission could not even approach a NSA officer without arousing suspicion, the SVR would need to use an intermediary, called an "access agent," whose affiliations with it were not known to the FBI. Such an operation would require establishing a network of illegals in the America, as the SVR did after Putin became President. Even them, the intermediary would have to find a plausible pretext to approach the target with revealing his actual interest.

The emergence of computer networks in the 1990s greatly expanded the SVR's recruiting horizon. It offered an opportunity to penetrate a new layer at the NSA employees: civilian technologists working under contract for the US government. Many of these civilians at the NSA, especially the younger ones, had been drawn from the hacking and game-playing culture. Some had even taken courses abroad on hacking techniques. They presented the SVR was inviting targets for recruitment. As was previously mentioned, Russian intelligence had considerable experience in Germany with hacktavists who tended to be anarchists. There were also supporters of the Libertarian movement. The common denominator was often their resentment expressed in their postings s of the United States and its allies attempting to limit the downloading of copy-righted music, movies and software on the Internet, all of which went under the rubric of "freedom of the Internet." They also vocally objected to the NSA using built-in backdoors in their software to read their encrypted messages. They were not difficult to find on the Internet. The donors to Ron Paul's Libertarian election campaign (including Snowden) were a matter of public record, for example.

Even if there was no shortage of hacktavists who believed the surveillance of the Internet by the NSA was an evil worth fighting, the SVR still had to find a plausible way of approaching members of this counterculture without offending them. Clearly, the SVR could no longer use out- of-date Communist and anti-capitalist ideology as a lure. Russia was far more authoritarian than the U.S, when it came to the Internet. One viable alternative for the SVR was custom-tailoring false flags to appeal to hacktavists.

For this purpose the Internet provided a near perfect realm for false flags. Since it is a place where true identities cannot easily be verified, intelligence services could employ a protean kit of disguises to assume false identities to entice potential dissidents into communicating with them. The KGB's earlier efforts to use hacktavist groups in Germany had produced little, if any, intelligence because of the "stove-piping" the NSA used to isolate its computers from networks that could be hacked into from the outside. It will be recalled that the NSA threat officer had cited these failures in his 1996 report on NSA vulnerability. He also said that efforts of the Russian Intelligence Services to use false flag recruitments provided the KGB with "a learning experience." The KGB had learned that hacking by itself could not breech the NSA's protective stove-piping. He predicted that its next logical move would be to "target insider computer personnel." These false flag recruitment would aim at, in his view, system administrators, computer engineers and cyber service workers who were either already inside the NSA or who had a secrecy clearance that would facilitate getting jobs with NSA contractors.

Even with an appropriate false flag, the task of finding such a "Prometheus" was daunting. There were some five thousand civilian technicians at the NSA of all political stripes. Finding the one who met its espionage requisites was the equivalent of seeking the sharpest needle in the proverbial giant haystack. For espionage purposes, however, recruiters did not have to find the sharpest needle, or any particular one; they just needed to find any needle in a position to cooperate. They could hone a willing recruit over time to do the job at hand.

The size of the haystack could also be reduced to more manageable proportions by hacking into the personnel records of the intelligence workers seeking to renew their security clearance. The Internet provided the SVR with just this opportunity. As discussed in the previous chapter, holes in the security of the computer networks of the US Office of the Office of Personal Management, USIS and the websites of the companies supplying the NSA with independent contractors had made the background checks on American intelligence workers available to the Chinese and presumably other adversary intelligence service hackers since 2011. If the SVR had access to this personnel data, the research for a candidate would be greatly facilitated. From the 127-page standard form 86 each applicant for a security clearance submits, the SVR could filter out intelligence workers employed by the NSA by their educational background, employment history, affiliations and foreign contacts. It could then search this data for candidates with a possible hacktavist profile,

This data could next be crossed with a list of individuals SVR in contact with high-profile activists who are part of the anti-surveillance movements. This would include core participants in the TOR project, Wikileaks, Noisebridge, Crypto Parties, and the Freedom of the Press Foundation and the Electronic Freedom Foundation. (Snowden, for example, had been in touch with members all these groups in 2012 and 2013.)

The SVR would have little problem monitoring even encrypted communications with leading figures in the Anti-surveillance world. These activists, despite secrecy rituals such as putting their cell phones in refrigerators, remain visible to a sophisticated intelligence service such as the SVR. Consider, for example, the defensive tactics of Laura Poitras, including PGP encryption, TOR software, and air-gapped computers which are computers that have never been connected to the Internet. She also famously changes her tables at restaurants to evade surveillance. With all these precautions, she did not keep secrets about her sources entirely to herself. Snowden, at a time when he was stealing NSA secrets in February 2013, went to great lengths to impress on Poitras the need for operational security about his contacts with her, but that injunction did not prevent her from telling at least five people about her source, including Micah Lee, the Berkeley-based technology operative for the Freedom of the Press Foundation; Jacob Appelbaum, the TOR proselytizer; Ben Wizner, the ACLU lawyer; Barton Gellman; and Glenn Greenwald. "It is not me that can't keep a secret, "Abraham Lincoln joked. "It's the people I tell it that can't." In the same vein, Poitras could hardly rely on these five confidants not to tell her (and Snowden's) to others. Hours after he was told, Greenwald told his lover David Miranda about the source in great detail. He even asked him to evaluate the source's bona fides for him. Gellman, for his part, raised the matter with a former high official at the Justice Department.

Moreover, as the intelligence world knew, Poitras was herself a veritable lightning rod for attracting ex-NSA employees who objected to some of its surveillance programs. In 2012, her filming of NSA insiders, including Binney and Drake, would make her communications of interest to any intelligence services that wanted to keep tabs on possible NSA dissidents.

Nor was Snowden himself overly discreet. It will be recalled that he had also advertised his TOR-sponsored crypto party activities over the Internet, and supplied Runa Sandvik, who worked with Appelbaum, his true name and address in Hawaii. Sandvik had no reason not to share the identity of her co-presenter with others in the TOR movement. Snowden also had his girl friend make a video of his presentation, as will be recalled. He also bragged about operating the largest TOR outlets in Hawaii. Even if his TOR software provided him a measure of anonymity, it was not beyond the ability of the world-class cyber services to crack it.

Under Putin, Russia had built one of the leading cyber espionage services in the world. According to a 2009 NSA analysis of Russian capabilities, which was obtained by the *New York Times* in 2013, Russia's highly-sophisticated tools for cyber-espionage were superior to those of China or any other adversary nation. For example, investigators from FireEye, a well-regarded Silicon Valley security firm, found that in 2007, Russian hackers had developed a highly-sophisticated virus that could bypass the security measures of the servers of both the US government and its private contractors. According to one computer security expert, the virus had made protected Internet websites "sitting ducks" for these Russian sophisticated hackers. The cryptographer Bruce Schneier, a leading specialist in computer security, explained, "It is next to impossible to maintain privacy and anonymity against a well-funded government adversary."

Nor has the Russian cyber service has made a secret out of the fact that it targets TOR software. It even offered a cash prize to anyone in the hacking community who could break TOR. Prior to 2013, according to cyber security experts, it spent over a decade building cyber tools aimed at unraveling the TOR networks used by hacktavists, criminal enterprises, political dissidents and rival intelligence operatives. To this end, it reportedly attempted to map out computers that served as major TOR exit nodes (such as the one Snowden operated in 2012 near a NSA regional base in Hawaii.) It also reportedly attached the equivalent of "electronic ink" to messages which would allow it to trace the path of messages that passed through them. Through this technology, it could tag and follow TOR users as their communications travelled across the Internet. It could even borrow their Internet identities. To be sure, .the NSA also had such a capability. The Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht discovered to his distress that his TOR software did not make his computer server in Iceland invisible. According to a former top official in the Justice Department, the NSA was able to locate it by cracking the TOR software, (Ulbricht is currently serving a life prison sentence for his Silk Road activities.). Unlike adversary services, however, the NSA needs a warrant to investigate US citizens who use TOR.

Even the NSA is not immune from an attack of its own computers. CIA deputy director Morell, who served on the committee evaluating the NSA's vulnerability in the Snowden affair after retiring from the CIA in 2013, wrote in his 2015 book "The Great War of our Times," that many financial institutions have "better cyber security than the NSA." If nothing else, the Internet helped make the activities of US intelligence workers visible to the SVR.

Even if the SVR theoretically had opportunities, it still had to find at least one disgruntled civilian contractor inside in the NSA who had access to the sealed-off computer networks. Did it find its man? If so, was it before or after Snowden arrived in Hong Kong with the Level 3 NSA files?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Chinese Puzzle

"The first [false assumption] is that China is an enemy of the United States. It's not."

- Edward Snowden in Hong Kong

On August 11, 2014, in the Atlantic Ocean, an even took place of enormous concern to U.S. intelligence. A Chinese Jin Class Submarine launched an Intercontinental ballistic missile. The missile released 12 independently-targeted re-entry vehicles, each simulating a nuclear warhead. Some 4400 miles away, in China's test range in the Xinjiang desert, each of the 12 simulated nuclear warheads then hit their targets within a 12 inch radius. The test firing, which was closely monitored by the NSA, was a strategic game changer. It meant that a single Jin Class submarine, which carried 12 such missiles and 144 nuclear warheads, could destroy every city of strategic importance in the United States. U.S intelligence further reported at China would soon fully stealth its newer submarines against detection, "giving China its first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent" against an American attack.

By 2015, as its test in the Atlantic had foreshadowed, China had armed its land-based as well as sea-based missiles with multiple independently targeted warheads. Combined with the state--of-the-art technology it had licensed from Russia, its systematic use of espionage made it possible for China to even build its own stealth fighters.

Unlike the U.S, China did not achieve this remarkable capability to launch independently-targeted miniaturized nuclear weapons and stealth them by investing hundreds of billions of dollars in developing them. It obtained this technology mainly through espionage. The history of this enterprise, though unsung, is stunning. The Chinese intelligence service stole a large part, if not all of America's secret technology for weaponizing nuclear bombs during the 1980s and 1990s. The theft was so massive that in 1998 the House of Representatives of the US Congress set up a special bipartisan investigative unit called the "Select Committee on National Security and Military and Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China." Based on the intelligence amassed by the NSA, CIA and other intelligence services, it concluded in its report that the Chinese intelligence service had obtained both by electronic and conventional spying the warhead design of America's seven most advance thermonuclear weapons. Moreover, it found that China's espionage successes allowed China to so accelerate the design, development and testing of its own nuclear weapons that the new generation of Chinese weapons would be "comparable in effectiveness to the weapons used by the United States." Further, it found that these thefts of nuclear secrets had not been isolated or opportunistic incidents. The Committee reported to Congress that they were the "results of decades of intelligence operations against U.S.

weapons laboratories." The Chinese intelligence service further obtained from private US defense contractors through cyber espionage important elements of the stealth technology used in both advanced planes and submarines. China shared (or exchanged) the fruits of its espionage on nuclear warhead design with North Korea, Pakistan, Iran and Russia.

Despite its formidable intelligence coups in the US, the Chinese intelligence service managed to remain among the most elusive of America's intelligence adversaries. Its espionage organizations are hidden behind layers of bureaucracy in the Ministry of State Security, Chinese Communist party structures, and the second, third and fourth department of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army. Much of its cyber espionage units are concealed on the campuses of its universities. Its hierarchy, or order of battle, is also obscure. Few traces have been uncovered of any conventional espionage networks in the United States and no major Chinese spy has ever been arrested. Part of the reason that Chinese espionage has proved so elusive to the eyes of western counter-intelligence, was that, unlike Russia, it did not ordinarily rely on intelligence officers in its embassies to recruit penetration agents to steal secrets. It did not even have an embassy in the United States during most of the Cold War. Instead, its services specialize it assembly mosaics of intelligence assembled from a wide variety of sources including non-classified documents, returning graduate students, scientific conferences, exchanges with allies, and a vast operation of hacking into computers, or cyber- espionage.

Cyber-espionage is indeed a vast enterprise in China. Graduating over 150,000 computer science engineers, it had no shortage of personnel. It also had developed the cyber tool kit to gain access to the computer networks of US government contractors and consultants in the private sector and government agencies, planting "sleeper" bugs in net-worked computers. Like human "sleeper" agents, these hidden programs can be activated when needed for operational purposes. Chinese controllers can retrieve emails, documents and turn on the cameras and microphones of personal computers, tablets and smart phones. By 2007, Paul Strassmann, a top US defense expert on cyber-espionage, reported that China had inserted "zombie" programs in some 700,000 computers in the US which could be used to mount cyber attack to retrieve emails from other computers. The Chinese service also reportedly penetrated companies that provide Internet services, including Google Yahoo, Symantec, and Adobe, which allowed it to track emails and enclosures of individuals. With such an invisible army of zombie computers, it is not entirely surprising that China finds little need to employ human: sleeper" agents.

Chinese cyber-specialists used this capability to hack into computers of outside contractors, including Booz Allen and other companies that supplied technologists to the NSA. It also had notable successes in obtaining the dossiers of US employees and independent contractors at the NSA, CIA and other intelligence services. Its intrusions, as previously noted, into computer network at the Office of Personnel Management traced back to 2009. Eventually, by 2015, according to US estimates, the cyber attack had harvested over twenty million personnel files of past and present Federal government employees. In addition, it reaped in over 14 million background checks of intelligence workers done by the Federal Investigative Service. All the intelligence workers with a SCI clearance, such as Snowden, were required to provide in these forms information about all their foreign acquaintance, including any non-U.S. officials that the applicant knew or had relationships with in the past. They also had to list their foreign travel, family members, police encounters, mental health, and credit history. For good measure, Chinese hackers obtained the confidential medical histories of government employees by hacking into the computers of Anthem and other giant heath care companies. If the Chinese intelligence services consolidated the fruits of these hacking attacks it would have a searchable database of almost everyone working in the American defense and intelligence complex. From this database, it could track individuals with high security clearances vulnerable to being bribed, blackmailed or tricked into cooperating. No one doubted that the Chinese would use their cyber capabilities to take advantage of weaknesses in foreign computer systems. General Hayden said of the massive theft of intelligence personnel records: “those records are a legitimate foreign intelligence target.” He added, “If I, as director of the NSA or CIA would have had the opportunity to grab the equivalent in the Chinese system, I would not have thought twice.” If that opportunity did not arise for the NSA or CIA during Hayden’s tenure, it may have been because no insider in the Chinese intelligence services provided US intelligence with a road map to it.

Cyber espionage was not the Chinese Intelligence Service only powerful resource in the intelligence war. To get both electronic intelligence and human intelligence about the United States, China also had a highly-productive intelligence sharing treaty with Russia. It was signed in 1992 after the Soviet Union was dissolved. Although the terms of this exchange remain secret, defectors from the Russian KGB and SVR reported that Chinese intelligence received from Russia a continuous stream of communication intelligence about the US in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Russia’s intelligence resources during this period were formidable. They included geo-synchronous satellites, listening stations in Cuba, sleeper agents and embassy-based spy networks. Presumably, this relationship further deepened under President Putin’s regime. Putin asserted in his speeches in 2014 that Russia and China continue to share a key strategic objective: countering the United States’ domination of international relations, or what Putin terms, “a unipolar world order.” China’s President Xi Jinping expressed a very similar view, saying in 2014 in a thinly-veiled reference to the United States, stating that any American attempt to “monopolize” international affairs will not succeed.

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been the major supplier of almost all of China’s modern weaponry. It licenses for manufacture in China avionics, air defense systems, missile launchers, stealth technology, and submarine warfare equipment. To make these arms effective, it also provides China with up-to-date intelligence about the ability of the United States and its allies to counter them. While such intelligence cooperation may be limited by the reality that China and Russia still compete in some areas, there is no reason to assume that they do not share the fruits of their cyber and conventional espionage against the NSA. After all, the NSA works to intercept the military and political secrets of both these allies. Moreover, NSA secrets might are a form of currency in the global intelligence war.

Snowden's trip to Hong Kong in May 2013 made the Chinese intelligence service, willy-nilly, a potential player in game. Hong Kong is a part of China, even if independently administrated, and, as such, China has full responsibility for its national security and foreign affairs. This mandate includes monitoring foreign intelligence operatives. The Chinese intelligence service accordingly runs much of the local intelligence apparatus in Hong Kong. For this purpose, it maintains its largest intelligence base outside of mainland China in Hong Kong. Its officers are stationed officially in the Prince of Wales skyscraper in central Hong Kong and unofficially maintain informers in Hong Kong's police, governing authority, airport administration and at other levers of power in Hong Kong. It checks the computerized visitors entering Hong Kong, and has the capability to ferret names that match those in the immense date base its global cyber espionage has amassed. When it detects the entry of any person of possible intelligence interest, it has the opportunity of using its sophisticated array of cyber tools to remotely steal data from those individuals. Such remote surveillance was so effective in 2013 that the US State Department had instructed all its personnel in Hong Kong to avoid using their Iphones, Androids, Blackberries and smart phones when travelling to Hong Kong or China. Instead, it has supplied them with specially-altered phones that disable location tracking and have a remotely-activated switch to completely cut off power to it circuitry. No one in the intelligence community doubts the prudence of taking such precautions in the realm of China.

Once Hong Kong had served as a window into China for Western intelligence, but in the first decade of the 21st century, the Chinese intelligence service had achieved such a pervasive presence in Hong Kong, and such ubiquitous electronic coverage of diplomats and other foreigners even suspected of involvement in foreign intelligence work, that the CIA and British intelligence found it almost as difficult to operate in Hong Kong as in mainland China. The CIA as well as the DIA kept a few officers there, but, as a former CIA station chief told me in September 2013, that for the purposes of intelligence operations, the CIA "regards Hong Kong as hostile territory."

Snowden apparently knew the limits of CIA operations in Hong Kong. It indeed provided him with an envelope of protection. He told Greenwald, as will be recalled, that he was counting on the Chinese presence in Hong Kong to deter the CIA from intruding on their meetings.

Snowden also must have realized that he was entering the Chinese sphere of influence when he flew to Hong Kong in May 2013. Yet, he took with him level 3 NSA secrets which he could assume would be of great interest to China. In fact, he advertised this fact in his interview with the *South China Post*, a newspaper controlled in 2013 by mainland China. Whatever he may have assumed about the inability of the CIA to stop him in Hong Kong, he had no reason to assume that Chinese intelligence service would relegate itself to purely passive role, especially when secret NSA's documents were in a hotel room in Hong Kong. Snowden may have esteemed himself to be an independent actor playing Prometheus on a global stage provided by YouTube, but the Chinese may have viewed him as nothing more as another pawn in the Game of Nations.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Pawn in the Game

"The whole key is, the state department's the one who put me in Russia."
--Edward Snowden in Moscow, 2014

When Snowden arrived in Hong Kong on May 20, 2013 he became a person on interest to any parties who knew, or later learned, about his coup. How could they not be interested this intelligence defector? He had brought with him enough US government secrets to, as he put it, make NSA "sources go dark that were previously productive". Snowden also fully realized the lethal situation that his possession of NSA documents put him. He was after his arrival in Hong Kong, as he put it, the NSA's "single point" of a potential catastrophic intelligence failure. He also stated the consequences if caught, telling Poitras: "The US Intel community will certainly kill you if they think you are the single point of failure."

The reason that Snowden considered himself of such importance to be the "single point of failure" was the pay load of secrets he was carrying. He possessed thumb drives full of files so critical to the NSA that in the wrong hands they could cause, in his view, many of the key sources of the entire US communication intelligence service to "go dark." Not only was he carrying these files, but he had willingly bought them inside the territory of China; a place in which America's main adversaries, China and Russia, could operate freely. Whoever he sought to deal with in Hong Kong, or whatever idealistic axe he intended to grind there, he could not expect his position as a "single point of failure"—a position he advertised in his email correspondence—would not attract the attention of other players in the game of nations.

The enormous power of the NSA rested on a frail thread: its ability to keep secret from its foes its sources and methods. General Alexander could call the NSA's communication intelligence "the queen on the chessboard," but, like the queen in a chess game, it could be captured by a well-placed pawn. In this case, the pawn, which had it in his power to expose the NSA's critical sources and methods, would also be considered fair game for capture by an adversary. And both the Chinese and Russian cyber services, whether working alone or together, had the technological means in China to tap into Snowden's computer. They also had an interest in learning how the NSA was listening in on their secret communications. If any further incentive was needed, an intelligence service could barter them to other countries whose signals were also intercepted by the NSA. Michael Morell, the CIA's Deputy Director at the time, said in his book "The Great War of Our Times" that just a few selected parts of Snowden's cache could be traded to the intelligence services of Iran and North Korea.

Snowden, realizing that he now represented that weak link in the architecture of America's intelligence system, made a move from the U.S. that greatly increased the stakes. He entered what he knew to be hostile intelligence territory with his stash of stolen secrets. He did so, as he explained to Greenwald in Hong Kong, to reduce the possibility of an American countermove against him or his associates in the media. But while succeeding in limiting the reach of the CIA, FBI, NSA and their allies, he willy-nilly put himself under the protection of America's adversary, the Chinese security services. In light of the counterintelligence training he had received at the CIA, he could not be unaware his move into Chinese-controlled territory would not prevent

adversary services, which also had the home court advantage, from stepping in. He also gave adversaries an ample, if not wholly irresistible reason, to enter the game by saying that he had access to NSA's sources in China.
How could they resist such a prize?

As confidant as Snowden may have been that he was in control, the CIA believed that confidence was misinformed. CIA Deputy Director Morell said, after reviewing the case on a panel appointed by President Obama: "Snowden thinks he is smart, but he was never in a position in his previous jobs to fully understand the immense capabilities of our Russian and Chinese counterparts." He could adopt a self-confident tone in his post-mortem conversations with journalists in Moscow, but he had no means to block the efforts of the Chinese or Russian services in Hong Kong. These intelligence services had no restrictions on their actions. For example, the Chinese intelligence service could have spotted him on his arrival in Hong Kong simply by cross- checking its aforementioned database of US intelligence workers who had applied for a renewed security clearance in the past three years. It could have pinpointed his whereabouts through its informant network in the Hong Kong Police and the security staffs of hotels. Snowden's mysterious "carer" would not be immune from detection by that network. Russia, China's longtime intelligence ally, would not even need to go to such lengths since, as Putin gloatingly confirmed, he contacted its diplomats in Hong Kong. The Russian intelligence service would them swing into action while Russian "diplomats" entered into talks with him. The Russians would also glean from Snowden's request for asylum that Hong Kong was only a temporary stopover for him,

"The purpose of my [Hong Kong} mission was to get the information to journalists," he would tell the *Guardian* after he was safely ensconced in Moscow. After that brief mission, he was "done" in Hong Kong. Where he planned to go next, mainland China was only a taxi ride away and there was a direct flight to Moscow.

Snowden does not say how many days he planned to be in Hong Kong, but he indicated that he was working under a tight clock. The time pressure resulted in him emailing Gellman at the *Washington Post* an ultimatum on May 24, 2013: either Gellman publish the selected documents in the *Washington Post* within 72 hours or he would lose the exclusive scoop. He wanted the story to break on May 27, 2013 without his true identity (which Gellman did not know). Hid identity would be known to a foreign mission in Hong Kong if Gellman acceded to his demands. Since as previously mentioned, Gellman's story would enclose an encoded signal he planned to use as proof of his bona fides. So even before the *Guardian* reporters had agreed to come to Hong Kong, he had plans to deal with a foreign mission. But he planned to keep his name out of it. Instead, he insisted Gellman include in it a coded signal in it. When the *Washington Post* turned down his ultimatum, he needed a different plan.

Time was running out if he was to break the story and leave Hong Kong before the NSA realized he was missing. At best, he was safe until June 3rd. That was when he was supposed to return from his two-week medical leave for getting treatment for epilepsy. But if he failed to show up in Hawaii on June 3rd, alarm bells at the NSA would go off. It would not take long to find him. Airline record would show that he had flown to Hong Kong. The NSA security staff would ask questions, as Snowden explained from Moscow: "This guy isn't where he says he's supposed to be. He's supposed to be getting medical treatment. Why the hell is he in Hong Kong?" It would then determine he had lied about his medical treatment, and it would immediate go after him with the full power of the U.S. government.

The day after his attempt to pressure the *Washington Post,* he asked Greenwald to drop everything he was doing and immediately fly to Hong Kong. He had, it will be recalled, already sent Poitras an enciphered file, and told her she would get the key once she and Greenwald followed his instructions. Presumably, he wanted Greenwald's story and the video done in Hong Kong before he became a suspect. If they had immediately flown to Hong Kong that May, it still might have left Snowden an escape window.

As Snowden found out, when dealing with journalists, things do not always go as planned. Greenwald, although agreeing to come to Hong Kong, waited in New York for two days while the *Guardian* editors completed their due diligence. Poitras waited with him. As a result of this delay, Snowden's clock ran out. Greenwald and Poitras did not arrive at his hotel in Hong Kong until June 3rd. It would be only hours before he became a prime suspect. "It was a nervous period," Snowden recalled. Although he bravely told the *Guardian,* "there was no risk of compromise/" That claim was, at best, wishful thinking on his part.

By this time, he was no longer invisible. Not only had he registered at the hotel under his true name and provided his credit card, but he was he in contact with three high-profile journalists, two well-known hacktavists and, as he suggested to Gellman, a foreign diplomatic mission. Even if Snowden had failed to persuade the *Washington Post* to publish a coded identifier, the mission's interest would likely be piqued when the newspaper published it first story on June 5th. Even if adversary intelligence services had missed Snowden and his archive of NSA documents earlier in May, they would not neglect the availability of such a prize after the NSA stories broke in the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* on June 5th. Greenwald even went on TV in Hong Kong, revealing to every interested intelligence service, in the unlikely event that that they did not already know, that a defector from the NSA was in Hong Kong.

Now there was no point in keeping his identity a secret. On June 9th Poitras released the famous video showing Snowden a secret NSA documents, At this point, Snowden shone so brightly as a beacon that every player in the in the intelligence game would realize that Snowden was a pawn to be captured.

Snowden still was able to fog over his travel plans, at least in the media, by telling reporters that he intended to remain in Hong Kong and fight extradition in court, but certainly the Russian officials whom he contacted knew he had other plans. They had even relayed his request to go to Russia to Putin. His movements were also no secret to sophisticated intelligence services. In an era in Hong Kong ii which cell phones emit their GPS location every 3 seconds and CCTV cameras scan many street intersections, it is not easy to conceal one's whereabouts. In Snowden's case, his photograph was constantly on television, posters and giant billboards. Even if he threw away his own phone, his retinue of lawyers and helpers could be tracked with ease.

China, who's President, Xi Jinping was meeting President Obama for the first time in Rancho Mirage, California on June 9th, would have certainly been keenly interested in the unfolding Snowden affair. After all, Obama had publically put on his agenda that week calling Xi to task for Chinese cyber espionage. Such a charge was undermined by Snowden's globally-publicized accusation that the United States was engaged in massive cyber espionage. In any event, as US intelligence verified, China had, almost immediately after the release of the video, instituted a full court press of Snowden in Hong Kong. Its security apparatus presumably had the means to monitor his room as well as those of Poitras and Greenwald. From that moment on, it is not likely that any communication or movement, Snowden made during his next 18 days in Hong Kong would escape its scrutiny.

The U.Ss also had the ability to track Snowden's movements via the cell phones of his lawyers and other confederates after he surfaced. This tracking could all be done by the NSA. What the U.S. lacked was any practical means to capture a high-profile intelligence defector in a city that was part of China. By this time, US intelligence had established that Chinese and Hong Kong security services were monitoring Snowden's every move. This left few options in the game for the U.S. "I'm not going to be scrambling jets to get a 29-year-old hacker," President Obama said on June 27, 2013.

The real prize, in any case, was not Snowden himself but the NSA's secrets documents that he had with him in Hong Kong. When Snowden was observed entering the Russian consulate, the game was all but over. US diplomats could protest over back channels to Moscow, as they did, but, with a trove of NSA secrets at stake, there was little expectation that they stop the Russians. Two days later, the "single point of failure," as Snowden described himself, was on his way to Russia, where he would be subject to Moscow's rules.

When a victory is obtained in a major sports event, such as the world cup, it is celebrated with victory dances, parties and ticker-tape parades. The opposite is true in the Game of Nation. An intelligence victory involving secret documents, even if it cannot be entirely hidden, is kept veiled, as far as is possible, to increase the value of the coup. "The final move in any sophisticated intelligence game," Angleton told me in relation to espionage intelligence coup, is "obscuring a success."

Following Angleton's precept the Russian or Chinese intelligence services, if they had a role in acquiring the product of the self-described "single point of failure," would work to cover their tracks in the affair even before the Aeroflot plane carrying Snowden touched down at Sheremetyevo International Airport on June 23, 2013. If any false flag operations had been used to trick, mislead, or otherwise induce Snowden to come to Hong Kong, they would be disbanded. If any safe housed had been used to quarter Snowden in his first 11 days in Hong Kong, they would be shut down. If any operatives had been used in Hawaii to guide or assist Snowden, they would be put back into the sleep mode. If any tell-tale traces had been left in chat rooms or social media, they would be systematically deleted. Even more important to the ultimate success of such a communications intelligence coup, measures would be taken to conceal the extent of the damage done by the "single point of failure" by not precipitously closing down compromised sources. Snowden might believe that the power of the information he held was so great that, if disclosed by him, all the NSA's sources would immediately go dark in Russia and China, but Russia might not wish to provide such clarity to its adversaries. An intelligence service need not close down channels it discovers are compromised by an adversary. Instead it can elect to continue to use them and furnish through them bits of sensitive information to advance its own national interest. The real danger here was not that the NSA's "lights" would dramatically be extinguished but that all the future messages illuminated by those lights would be less reliable sources of intelligence. The Game of Nations is, after all, merely a competition among adversaries to gain advantages by the surreptitious exchange of both twisted and straight information. When the NSA asserted in the summer of 2013 that over one million documents, it was recognizing the most massive failure in its 60 year history. Not only NSA secrets, but secret files from the CIA, the British GCHQ, and America's cyber military commands, had been compromised. It was, as Sir David Omand, the head of the British GCHQ described it, a "huge, strategic setback" for the West. The genie could not be put back in the bottle as there is not a reset button in this game. The best that the NSA could do now was damage control while its adversaries took full advantage of the setback. Several hundred US and British intelligence officers worked around the clock in Washington DC, Fort Meade, Maryland and Cheltenham, England for months on end to determine if which parts could be still salvaged from what had been until the Snowden breach the most powerful communications intelligence system in the world.

Adding insult to injury, Snowden, speaking from his new perch in Moscow, told applauding audience that the entire purpose of the U.S. exercise, including deliberately "trapping" him in Moscow, was to "demonize" him. For Russia, it was a textbook move. By providing Snowden with this platform to rail against the surveillance practices of his adversaries, Putin laid claim to the moral high ground in the Game of Nations.

What remains missing from this picture is Snowden's motive in requesting documents from other foreign intelligence services, such as the GCHQ, and copying lists of NSA sources. It is difficult to believe that his motive was conventional whistle-blowing since these documents were not among those l he gave to journalists in Hong Kong. It will be recalled that his legal representative in Moscow, Anatoly Kucherena, said that he taken to Russia, and had access to, NSA documents that he had not given to journalists. He had gone effort in his final weeks at the NSA to take documents that any adversary service would prize. Copying them was, as we have seen, part of his well-calculated plan. Did he use them, as he used the documents he gave to Poitras, Greenwald and Gellman, as leverage in his transformation? Since the role that Moscow may have played in Snowden's remarkable defection, while less visible than that of the movie-makers, journalists and activist, cannot be ignored in this puzzle. Since it requires a closer examination of the machinations that brought Snowden to Russia, I made arrangements to visit Moscow in October 2015.

PART FIVE

WALKING THE CAT BACK

Deception is a state of mind—and the mind of the state

--James Jesus Angleton

Chronology 3

Snowden in Russia

2013

June 23 Snowden arrives from Hong Kong at Sheremetyevo International Airport on Aeroflot flight SU213 at 5:15 PM local time.

Sarah Harrison arrives from Hong Kong at Sheremetyevo International Airport on Aeroflot flight SU213 at 5:15 PM local time.

July 12 Snowden, in his first public appearance in Russia, holds press conference at Sheremetyevo International Airport,

July 14 Snowden first meets Anatoly Kucherena, his lawyer-to-be

August 1 Snowden's application for asylum is granted for one year.

September 23 Kucherena states Snowden has access to NSA documents in Russia

October 2 Ray McGovern, Thomas Drake, Coleen Rowley and

Jesselyn Radack meets with Snowden and Harrison.

October 10 Snowden aided by ACLU legal team put together by Ben Wizner

October 16 Snowden interviewed, via Internet, by James Risen (*NY Times*)

November 1 Snowden joins the board of the Freedom of the Press Foundation

November 3 Sarah Harrison departs from Moscow.

December 21 Snowden meets with Gellman; his first in person interview in Moscow.

2014

January 2 Snowden meets in Moscow ACLU lawyers Ben Wizner and Anthony Romero

August 1 Snowden's residence permit is renewed for three years

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Dinner with Oliver Stone

"I had to 'tune to [Snowden's] wavelength' and try to balance between the rational and intuitive perception of his world. Having experienced these incredible sensations, I realized that I had to write about them, but only in the form of a novel that would not claim any sophisticated philosophical conclusions."

—Anatoly Kucherena

Before flying to Moscow, I arranged to have dinner with Oliver Stone at Parma, an Italian restaurant on the upper east side of New York. I had greatly respected Stone ability as a film director after watching him work in *Wall Street II: Money Never Sleeps*, a film in which I had a cameo role. I also had debated Stone about the historic accuracy of his 1990 movie *JFK* at Town Hall in New York.

When we dined, he had just written, produced, written and directed "Snowden," an independently-financed film depicting Snowden, as put, as "one of the great heroes of the 21st century." In preparing for it, he had not only seen Snowden in 2013 and 2014, but he had had a six-hour meeting with Putin.

The reason I wanted to talk to him was not to learn about the film but to find about how he had made to gain access to Snowden in Moscow. I already knew from the documents taken from Sony Pictures Entertainment allegedly by North Korea that Stone had paid the *Guardian* $700,000 for the film rights to "The Snowden File," a book written by Luke Harding. This was not a surprising sum since it provided a basis for movie which describes Snowden's coup. But these documents also revealed that Stone had paid Anatoly Kucherena, Snowden's legal representative in Moscow, $1 million dollars, supposedly for the rights to his novel *Time of the Octopus*. Even by Hollywood standards one million dollars was an extraordinary sum to pay for a yet-to-be published work of Russian fiction, and it was especially striking since Stone was making a fact-based movie using the actual names of the characters. "Is your script based on Kucherena's "Time of the Octopus?" I asked.

"No," Stone replied, "I haven't used it." He said that the payment was for what he termed "total access." He explained that Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, the producers of the James Bond franchise, had optioned Greenwald's book "No Place to Hide" to make into a movie about Snowden for Sony. Stone said that the million dollar deal with Kucherena effectively guaranteed that any competing project would not have access to Snowden. Sony consequently put the competing film on hold.

To be sure, it is not unusual for a lawyer to negotiate a deal on behalf of a client, but a lawyer ordinarily does not have the power to block a competing film access to their client. Clearly, Kucherena was no ordinary lawyer. Among other positions, he was on the public board of the FSB security service. In light of such connections, Stone said Kucherena might be acting as an intermediary for other parties who did control access to Snowden in Russia but that were not his concern. Kucherena delivered the exclusive access to Snowden.

Aside from being a skilled director, Stone is a shrewd producer who knew how to close a deal. He assessed, correctly as it turned out, that the payment to Kucherena would effectively block Sony's competing project. Where the money went was far less clear.

Towards the end of our dinner, Stone told me that he did not know I was writing a book about until a few weeks earlier. He learned of my book from Snowden. He said Snowden had expressed concern to him about the direction of the book I was writing. "What was it about?" Stone asked me.

I was taken aback. I had no idea that Snowden was aware of my book project, as I had not tried to contact him. I told Stone that I considered Snowden to be extraordinary man who had changed history. Although I was intentionally vague in my description, Stone seemed to be reassured.

That Snowden was aware that I was investigating him presented an opportunity. I asked Stone about the possibility of my seeing Snowden in Moscow.

Stone did not offer to arrange such a meeting. He said only that I "might want to speak to Anatoly [Kucherena]." This conversation suggested to me that Kucherena was Snowden's gate-keeper.

In his two years in Moscow, Snowden, or his handlers, had granted only a handful of face-to face interviews. One was with James Bamford, who was writing an article on Snowden for *Wired* magazine in 2014. But it took nearly nine months to arrange the meeting. "I have been trying to set up an interview with him [Snowden]—traveling to Berlin, Rio de Janeiro twice, and New York multiple times to talk with the handful of his confidants who can arrange a meeting. " he recounted in *Wired.* After my dinner with Stone, I hoped to find a quicker route.

First, I was advised that I needed a Moscow "fixer," the curious term that journalists commonly use to describe a local intermediary who arranges appointments in foreign countries. I retained Zamir Gotta, a highly respected TV producer in Moscow, who I was told had helped "fix" the Bamford interview with Snowden.

“There is only one door to Snowden,” Zamir wrote me. “His name is Kucherena.” Since Zamir said Kucherena rarely saw journalists he that he had a contact in his office. He further told me Kucherena required that any journalist seeking an interview with Snowden to submit his questions to him two weeks in advance and, if approved, sign a document stating I would not deviate from the questions. Next, my questions had to be translated from English to Russian (even though Snowden does not speak Russian) and then vetted by Kucherena’s staff. Zamir also suggested I stay at the National hotel in Red Square because Snowden has gone there for previous meetings with Bamford. So I sent Kucherena, via Zamir, ten questions that might interest Snowden (if they ever reached him.)

I next obtained a multi-entry Russian visa from the Russian consulate in New York, booked myself a room in the National hotel with a view of the Kremlin and used all my remaining frequent travel miles to book a direct flight on Aeroflot to Moscow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Vanishing Act

“They talk about Russia like it’s the worst place on earth. Russia’s great.”—Snowden Moscow, 2015

My night flight from New York to Moscow took less than eight hours. It landed at 7:40 AM on October 29, 2015 at terminal D a Sheremetyevo International Airport. I did not immediately proceed through passport control, not just because I wanted to avoid the killer bumper-to-bumper rush hour traffic, but because I wanted to explore the transit zone in which Snowden was supposedly trapped in for six weeks.

Sheremetyevo Two, where all international flights land, was built in the waning days of the Cold War for international passengers arriving for the Moscow 1980 Summer Olympics. It was modernized in 2010, including opening a walkway that connects Terminal D, E and F for transit passengers.

Snowden had vanished, at least from public view, in this complex of terminals for nearly six weeks in the summer of 2013. His explanation, as will be recalled, was two-part. First, he had planned to board the next fight to Cuba, and from there proceed to Ecuador. But he was unable to board this flight because his passport had been invalidated while he was flying to Russia by the U.S. Government. Second, after discovering his passport had been revoked, he stayed in a capsule hotel in the transit zone for the next 38 days.

To better understand the plausibility of his version of those events, I proceeded through the transit passage to Terminal F where Snowden’s plane from Hong Kong had landed at 5:15 PM Moscow time on June 23, 2013.

Snowden did not o through passport control on June 23rd. Before any of the other passengers were allowed to disembark from the plane, Russian plainclothes officers from the Special Services boarded the plane and asked both Snowden and Sarah Harrison, his Wiki leak’s supplied “ninja,” to accompany them to a waiting car that whisked them away. Assange and Harrison had organized a number of decoy flights. They may have confused U.S and British intelligence services, as they were intended to do, but they evidently did not fool the Russian intelligence services. According to the account in *Izvestia*, “a special operation was conducted for his reception and evacuation.” It further said: “Snowden flight to Moscow was coordinated with the Russian authorities and intelligence services.” What was less clear is whether Snowden had voluntarily participated in this “special operation” that effectively took him into custody. Wherever Snowden and Harrison were next taken-- the “transit zone” extends beyond the airport to medical and other facilities— he was not brought to Terminal E, where the next Aeroflot flight to Cuba departed at 1:40 PM on June 24th 2013.

Yet, if not for the "special operation", he could have easily gone by foot to Terminal E. It was, as I found, only a nine minute walk through the transit passageway in which one does not have to show a passport. But that raises the question: Was Snowden's plan really to go to Ecuador?

Consider Snowden's putative motivation in seeking sanctuary in Ecuador: his safety. Yet, Snowden assessed that he would be vulnerable to capture by the U.S. government in Ecuador. "If they [the U.S. Government] really wanted to capture me, they would've allowed me to travel to Latin America, because the CIA can operate with impunity down there," he explained in a recorded interview with Katrina vanden Heuvel, the editor of *The Nation,* in 2014, He had previously discussed the likelihood of his being captured in Ecuador with Julian Assange in Hong Kong in June 2013 before his departure for Moscow. He also told Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the *Guardian,* that he considered that he was at risk in Latin America. This vulnerability was no minor matter to Snowden. He told Glenn Greenwald in Hong Kong, before arranging to fly to Moscow, that his "first priority" was his own "physical safety." Since he did not believe Ecuador was a safe place for him, why would he leave the comparative safety of Russia and risk being kidnapped by American forces in Latin America?

Nor was a U.S. passport a prerequisite for U.S. citizens flying to Havana in 2013. Since the State Department did not sanction travel to Cuba for the general public, the vast majority of Americans going to Cuba obtained a travel document from a Cuban consulate so the Cuban entry stamp would not be marked in their passport.) So Snowden, if he really had intended to fly to Cuba, only needed this document. He had over a month to obtain it from the Cuban consulate in Hong Kong. But he did not. He could also have obtained a visa to Ecuador at its consulate in Hong Kong. But he did not. According to his lawyer Kucherena, who closely examined his passport in July 2013, Snowden had no visas at all. Unlike his words, Snowden's actions were with any plan to go to any place in Latin America.

Shortly after the "special operation," a tip was placed on a publicly-accessible Russian website saying that Snowden was booked on the Aeroflot flight SU-150 to Cuba on June 24th. In response to this anonymous tip, Russian and foreign news organization in Moscow ordered their reporters to buy tickets on that flight With their tickets, reporters swarmed into the departure area of the airport in such numbers that the police had to set up cordons. They checked all the VIP lounges, restaurants, rest rooms and boarding area for the next seven hours, but Snowden was nowhere to be found. A Russia Today reporter later said "It was a total madhouse. Everyone was screaming 'Snowden' at the airport ground staff." Over a hundred reporters actually boarded the plane.

In fact, Snowden had never checked in for that flight and, as far as is known, was never seen in terminal E. Only after the plane took off did the journalists realize Snowden was not aboard it. All they could do was photograph two of the unoccupied seats, 17A and 17 C, which they reported in tweets were Snowden's and Harrison empty seats. By the time the plane landed in Cuba Aeroflot denied that anyone named Snowden had ever been booked on any of its flight to

Cuba, a denial it continued to repeat to every reporter who queried the airline for the next six weeks.

The first news that Snowden was even in Russia came on July 1, 2013. A statement posted on n the Wikileaks web site and signed "Edward Snowden," after thanking "friends new and old" for his "continued liberty," accused President Obama of pressuring "leaders of nations from which I have requested protection to deny my asylum petitions. It added: "This kind of deception from a world leader is not justice, and neither is the extralegal penalty of exile. These are the old, bad tools of political aggression." Since the Aeroflot flight to Cuba was the only means of getting directly from Moscow to Latin America, Russian reporters, encouraged by the Wikileaks post, continued taking the daily 11 hour flight to Cuba until August 1, 2013, The charade only ended when Kucherena said in a press conference at the airport that Snowden would be taking up residency at an undisclosed location in Moscow, and walked out of the airport with Snowden.

The question remained: where had Snowden been staying for those 39 days? Sarah Harrison, his companion on the plane, told *Vogue* that she and Snowden had shared a windowless room in the transit zone, where they watched TV, washed their clothes in a sink basin and ate meals from the nearby Burger King. The only hotel with windowless rooms in the transit zone in 2013 was the Vozdushny V-Express Capsule Hotel, located next to a newly-opened Burger King restaurant.

I next went there. The polite V-express desk clerk, who spoke English, showed me the standard windowless double-room. It was approximately 24 square feet, the size of a large shipping container. Most of the floor space was taken up by twin bed. Across from the bed, behind a plastic curtain, was a stall with a shower, a toilet and sink. Not only was it very cramped quarters for two people to share but it was fairly expensive. It cost 850 rubles an hour (about $18 in 2013.) For 39 days that hourly charge would add up to $16,600. Even though Snowden claimed that he brought a large cache of cash to Russia, such a long stay was not allowed, according to the desk clerk. The maximum stay allowed by the hotel was 24 hours. So either the rule was waived for Snowden or he moved to another facility not available to the public.

I learned from a former KGB officer, there are a number of VIP quarters beyond the confines of the airport, including suites at the 400-room Novotel hotel, which is located about seven miles from the airport, that are used for debriefing and other purposes by the security services. According to him, the security services are not restricted from entering and leaving the transit zone.

The possibility that he was staying elsewhere would help explain the futile search for him by of a large number of reporters over those 39 days. When they learned from tweets that Snowden was not aboard plane to Havana on June 24th, they aggressively questioned every restaurant employees, security guards and airport personnel for weeks they could find. Some reporters even took rooms in the V-Express Capsule Hotel and "tipped" maids and other hotel employees. They also bought business-class tickets on flights to gain access to all the public VIP lounges in the transit zones. Despite this intensive search, none of them found anyone who had seen Snowden although his image was constantly shown on airport TV screens. Egor Piscunov, a Russian journalist who checked into the capsule hotel for 4 hours told me, “It was a total vanishing act.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Through the Looking Glass

"There's definitely a deep state. Trust me, I've been there"

—Edward Snowden in Moscow

While waiting to hear back from Kucherena's office, I arranged to meet with Victor Ivanovich Cherkashin, who gad been one of the most successful KGB spy handlers in the Cold War. Cherkashin, born in 1932, had served in the KGB's espionage branch from 1952 until 1991. He now operated a private security firm in Moscow. I was particularly interested in his recruitment of three top American intelligence officers; Aldrich Ames in the CIA, Robert Hanssen in the FBI and Ronald Pelton in the NSA. I hoped that seeing these intelligence coups through the eyes, and mind-set, of their KGB handler might provide some historical context for the Snowden defection. So I invited Cherkashin to lunch at Gusto, a quiet Italian restaurant, located near the Chekov Theater in central Moscow,

Cherkashin, a tall thin man with silver hair, showed up promptly at 1 pm. Wearing an elegant grey suit and dark tie, he walked with a spry step. Since he had served in counterintelligence in the Soviet Embassy in Washington D.C. for nearly a decade, he spoke flawless English,

I began the interview with one of the more celebrated cases he handled: the KGB recruitment of Aldrich Ames. Ames, a CIA counterintelligence officer, had worked as a Russian mole between April 1985 and January 1994. In those nine years, he rose, or was maneuvered by the KGB, into a top position in the CIA's highly-sensitive Counterintelligence Center Analysis Group, which allowed him to deliver hundreds of top secrets to the KGB. In return, according to Cherkashin, Ames received in cash between $20,000 and $50,000 for each delivery, which amounted to $4.6 million over the nine years.

I asked Cherkashin about the weakness the KGB looked for in an American intelligence worker that might lead him to copy and steal top secret documents. How did he spot a potential Ames? Was it a financial problem? Was it a sexual vulnerability? Was it an ideological leaning?

"Nothing so dramatic," he answered. What he looked for when assessing Ames's potential was an intelligence officer who is both dissatisfied and antagonistic to the service for which he works."

"The classic disgruntle employee," I interjected.

"Any intelligence officer who strongly feels that his superiors are not listening to him, and that they are doing stupid things, is a candidate," he continued. He said he had found that the flaw in a prospect that could be most dependably exploited was not his greed, lust, or deviant behavior but his resentment over the way he was being treated.

"Is that how you spotted Ames?"

"Actually he approached us, not vice versa." It was his job in the CIA to approach opposition KGB officers. "But yes we saw the potential," he said.

Since Ames had been initially paid by Cherkashin $50,000 in cash for his first delivery, I asked whether he fit into the category of a disgruntled employee. “Wasn’t he a mercenary/”

“I knew from our intelligence reports that he needed money for debts stemming from his divorce,” he answered. “But he was also angry at the stupidity and paranoia of those running the CIA. Ames told me at our first secret meeting that they were misleading Congress by exaggerating the Soviet threat.” Cherkashin evaluated Ames as a man who felt not only slighted by his superiors but “helpless to do anything about it” within the bureaucracy of the CIA. “The money we gave, even if he could spend only a small portion of it, gave him a sense of worth.” He explained that the KGB had an entire team of psychologists in Moscow that worked on further exploiting Ames’s resentment at his superiors.

The search for an adversary intelligence officer who resents his service was not limited to KGB recruiters. It was also the “classic attitude” that the CIA sought to exploit in its adversaries, according to its former deputy director. “You find someone working for the other side and tell him that he is not receiving the proper recognition, pay and honors due him,” Michael Morell said, pointing out that the same “psychological dynamic” could be used to motivate someone to “act alone” in gathering espionage material.

I next turned to an even more important KGB coup: his Robert Hanssen case. Hanssen was the FBI counterintelligence officer who worked as a KGB mole for 22 years between 1979 and 2002 and had delivered even more documents to the Russian intelligence services than Hanssen. “Did Hanssen’s dissatisfaction with the FBI, or his objections to its policies, play a role in his recruitment?” I asked.

“I didn’t recruit Hanssen,” Cherkashin replied, “He recruited himself. I never even knew his name or where he worked.” He added: “So I knew nothing about his motivation other than that he wanted cash.”

“So he was mercenary,” I suggested.

“All we knew was that he delivered valuable documents to us and asked for cash in return.” he said. “We didn’t control him, he controlled us.”

An uncontrolled mole that provided secrets to the KGB and SVR for 22 years was very different from fictional moles in the spy movies. I asked whether it would have been better if the KGB had him under its control.

“Possibly,” Cherkashin answered, “but as it turned out Hanssen was our most valuable penetration in the Cold War.”

Unlike Ames, whose nine-year career as a mole could be managed by the KGB, Hanssen decided what secret documents to steal and when to make contact or a delivery. He refused to even allow the KGB to suggest a site. All the communications with him were by letter or to a phone number in a used car ad Except for putting money into a dead drop, the KGB played only a passive role in the espionage. “Could Hanssen really be called a mole?” I asked.

“A mole is a term used in spy fiction,” he said. “We prefer to the more general term ‘espionage source.”

“So anyone who delivers state secrets to the KGB, for whatever reason, is an espionage source?” I asked.

“Certainly, if the information is valuable to us,” Cherkashin answered. “Hanssen delivered secrets exposing American human and electronic operations against Russia. He was our most valuable espionage source. It is the delivery of secrets, not the methods used, that counts.”

“If some unknown person simply delivered a trove of top-secret communications secrets to the doorstep of Russia would they it be accepted?” I asked with Snowden in mind.

“I can’t say what the SVR would do today. I am long retired” he said, with a nostalgic shake of his head. “But in my day, we needed some reason to believe to believe the gift was genuine.”

“Would you need to vet the person delivering it?”

“With Hanssen we did not have that opportunity,” he said. “If we believed the documents were genuine, we would of course grab them.”

The final recruitment I asked Cherkashin about was that of Ronald Pelton, the civilian employee of the NSA who had retired in 1979. Pelton had left the NSA without taking any classified documents with him. After retiring, he had financial difficulties, and he sought to get money from the KGB. On January 14, 1980, he walked into the Soviet embassy in Washington DC and asked to see an intelligence officer. After he was ushered into secure debriefing room, he said that he had information that Russia would find interesting, but he wanted money in return. What interested me about the Pelton case was that Cherkashin proceeded to recruit Pelton even though he was no longer working at the NSA, and Pelton no longer had access to the NSA. In addition, since the FBI had 24 hour surveillance on the embassy, Pelton had almost certainly been photographed entering it and also possibly had been recorded asking for an intelligence officer by electronic bugs that the KGB suspected that NSA had planted in the embassy. What did the KGB do in a situation in which ex-civilian employee at the NSA possessed no documents?

Despite the risks involved, Cherkashin decided Pelton had to be debriefed by communications intelligence specialists. So he had him disguised as a utility worker and smuggled out in a van to the residential compound of the Ambassador in Georgetown. A few days later, he was dropped off at a shopping mall, “Why did you go to such effort if Pelton had neither documents nor access to the NSA?” I asked.

"It was the information in his head that we wanted." Cherkashin said that as KGB rarely got access to any NSA officer, it was worth the risk. So he was given $5,000 in cash and a plane ticket to Vienna, where he was domiciled at the residence of the Soviet ambassador to Austria. A KGB's electronic communications expert, Anatoly Slavnov, was then sent to Vienna to supervise the Pelton debriefings. The debriefing sessions, which went on for 15 days, were from 8 AM to 6 PM. In them, Pelton managed to recall Project A, a joint NSA-CIA-Navy operation in which submarines surreptitiously tapped into Soviet undersea cables in the Sea of Okhotsk, which connected a to the Soviet Pacific Fleet's mainland headquarters at Vladivostok. Pelton received another $30,000 from the KGB.

"Did the information in his head proved valuable?" I asked.

"As long as the NSA didn't know the tap was compromised by Pelton, we could use the cable to send to the NSA the information we wanted it to intercept." He said while actual NSA documents would have proved more useful than someone's memories, "Our job is to take advantage of whatever we can get."

Two years later, Pelton was again flown to Vienna for a follow-up debriefing to see if he could recall any further details. Finally, in 1985, Pelton was arrested by the FBI and, like Ames and Hanssen, sentenced to life imprisonment.

Looking at his watch, Cherkashin politely excused himself, saying he had work to do. On parting, I signed a copy of my book on Angleton for him and thanked him for his insights.

Through the eyes of the KGB, a penetration of American intelligence was clearly opportunistic. If these practices continued, they put the Snowden case in a new light for me. If Russian intelligence considered it worthwhile to send an ex-civilian worker at the NSA, such as Ronald Pelton, from Washington D.C. 2,000 miles to Austria so that its specialists could debrief him on the secrets he held in his head, it would have an even greater interest in exfiltrating Snowden from Hong Kong to get, aside from his documents, whatever secrets he held in his head. If Russian intelligence was willing to opportunistically accept the delivery of U.S. secrets from an unknown espionage source that it neither recruited nor controlled, such as Hanssen, it would have little hesitancy in acquiring the secrets that Snowden had stolen on his own volition, even if Snowden acted for idealistic reasons. If Russian intelligence focused its search pattern on disgruntled American intelligence workers, such as Ames, it is plausible that it spotted Snowden through his Internet rants against U.S. surveillance. Even if it had missed Snowden in Hawaii, a disgruntled ex-civilian employee at the NSA would have received its full attention after he contacted Russian officials in Hong Kong. While the tactics of the SVR may have changed since Cherkashin retired, its objectives remained the same. And the NSA remained its principal target. Nor is there any reason to doubt that it still measures success in its ability to obtain, by whatever means, the secret sources and methods of its adversaries. Snowden was in a position, both with the documents he had taken and the knowledge he had in his head, to deliver the KGB such a coup.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Handler

As for his [Snowden's] communication with the outside world, yes, I am his main contact

--Anatoly Kucherena, September 23, 2013

Time was rapidly running out for me in Moscow. On November 1st, I still had not been able to make contact with Anatoly Kucherena, and my flight back to New York was in five days. My fixer, Zamir, had been trying to arrange an appointment for three weeks but he had only received one call back from Kucherena's assistant, Valentina Vladimirovna Kvirvova. She wanted to know how I knew Oliver Stone. He told her of my part in Stone's movie *Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps*. That was the last he had heard from her. Meanwhile a Moscow based journalist told me that she had waited 18 months to hear back from him giving up. I also learned from a Russian researcher that Kucherena had not given a single interview to any journalist since his television interview with Sophie Shevardnadze on September 23, 2013. And no Russian journalist, or any Moscow-based foreign journalist, had ever obtained an interview with Snowden. At this point, Zamir was becoming increasingly doubtful about getting my access to either Kucherena or Snowden.

But I had another contact in Moscow. When I had been investigating the 2006 Polonium poisoning of ex-KGB officer Alexander Litvinenko in London, I had interviewed a number of people in Moscow, including Andrei Lugovoy. A former KGB officer assigned to protecting the Kremlin's top members in the 1990s, Lugovoy later opened his own security company. In 2005, he became a business associate of Litvinenko's in gathering information, and made regular trips to London to meet with him. Since he had tea with Litvinenko at the Millennium hotel in London on November 1, 2006, the day Litvinenko was poisoned, he became the main suspect in the British investigation. He could not be extradited, however. After reconstructing the chronology of the crime, I established that Litvinenko had been contaminated with Polonium at a Japanese restaurant some four hours before his tea with Lugovoy. I therefore wrote that Lugovoy could not have poisoned Litvinenko in the Millennium hotel, a finding that he said he greatly appreciated.

Lugovoy was elected to the Duma in 2008, and also hosted a 24 part television series espionage for which he was personally decorated by Putin. He was also now reputed to be in the inner circle of power in Moscow. So I called him.

We arranged to meet in the lobby bar of the National Hotel. A short but well-built man with a bullet-style haircut, Lugovoy showed up promptly at 1 PM. After discussing some of the subsequent developments in the still-lingering Polonium investigation, I asked him if he knew Kucherena.

"I don't know him, but I know someone who does," he answered. "Why are you interested in seeing Kucherena?"

I told him that I wanted to speak to him about Snowden but that I had been unable to arrange a meeting.

"That's no problem," he said, raising his cell phone (which never left his hand.) He hit a number the speed dial, and spoke rapidly in Russian (which I do not understand.) He cupped his hand over the phone and asked how long I would be in Moscow.

After I told him that I was leaving on Friday, he spoke again in to the person on the other end. "You will have an appointment on Thursday," he said.

Later that afternoon Valentina, Kucherena's assistant, called to say that Kucherena would be happy to see me at his office at 6 PM on Thursday. I didn't ask Lugovoy who he had called or how this had happened. Clearly, whoever Lugovoy called had the power to arrange the meeting. Power evidently works in unseen ways in Putin's Russia.

Kucherena's office was only two subway stops from the National hotel, and I arrived ten minutes early. A receptionist showed me into a well-lit square room with an elegant table in the center. There was a sumptuous basket of exotic fruit on the table and large portraits of racehorses on the walls. Another door opened, and a tall, graceful woman came into the room and introduced herself as "Valentina." She was wearing a well-fitting black dress, striking jade necklace and high heels. When she asked whether I would like anything to drink, it seemed more like the prelude to an elegant dinner party than an interview about Snowden.

As Kucherena did not speak English, I brought Zamir along to translate for the conversation, but Valentina also spoke very good English. She apologized for the delay in responding to my requests, explaining that she received "thousands of requests" for interviews and did not have time to answer them. When I asked how many were answered, she shrugged and said "not many."

At that moment, Kucherena entered with a jaunty step, a cherubic face and an untamed white hair. He was wearing grey slacks, a partially buttoned cashmere polo sweater and a fully engaging smile.

As I had learned from his entry in Wikipedia, he was born in a small village in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldavia in 1960, and he had obtained his law degree from the All-Union Correspondence Law Institute in 1991. He opened his own law firm in Moscow in 1995. Kucherena's well-known friendship with Putin evidently had not hurt his law practice. His clients had included such well-connected defendants as Viktor Yanukovych, the overthrown president of Ukraine in 2014; Grigory Leps, a Russian singer blacklisted by the U.S. for allegedly acting as a money courier for a Eurasian criminal organization; Valentin Kovalev, a former Russian Minister of Justice charged with corruption; and Suleyman Kerimov, a civil servant from Dagestan, who had amassed an estimated fortune of $7.1 billion. Kerimov recently had been charged for manipulating a Potash cartel case in Belarus. Most of these clients were reputed to be part of Putin's inner circle.

To break the ice, I asked him about Oliver Stone. I knew he had a small role in Oliver Stone's forthcoming movie "Snowden." in which he plays Snowden's lawyer in Moscow.

"I was impressed by how few takes he needed to shoot my scene," he answered.

"How did you come to be Snowden's lawyer?" I asked.

"Snowden picked me from a roster of 15 lawyers with which he had been given." He then went to Sheremetyevo International Airport to meet his new client. They met on the morning of Friday July 12, 2013. At that point, he said that Snowden had been held virtually incommunicado for 20 days. Other than Russian officials, the only person he had been allowed to see during this period was Assange's aide, Sarah Harrison.

"Where in the airport did you meet him?" I asked. Was it in a VIP lounge?"

"It was in the transit zone," he replied coyly. "That is all I can say." They spoke through a translator, as Snowden did not speak Russian. By this time, Sarah Harrison had sent 21 countries petitions for asylum that were signed by Snowden. Whatever their purpose, Kucherena did not consider them helpful. "I told him that if he wanted to get sanctuary in Russia, he would have to immediately withdraw all the petitions in which he had asked other countries for asylum." Kucherena said that otherwise he could not represent him. Snowden agreed to that condition.

Later that afternoon Kucherena accompanied Snowden to area G9 in the transit zone where they emerged from a door marked "authorized personnel only" shortly before 5 PM. The room was packed with representatives of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Wikileaks and other Moscow-based activist groups. They had been invited the previous day by an emails signed "Edward Snowden" instructing then to go to Terminal F at Sheremetyevo International Airport where they would be met by airport personnel carrying a "G9." It was a rare, if not unprecedented, event, for an American citizen to defect to Russia.

Wearing an open-neck blue shirt and badly-creased jacket, Snowden read a prepared statement that accused the United States government of violating the universal declaration of human rights and described himself as a victim of political persecution. He then formally announced that he was "requesting asylum in Russia."

In discussing this meeting, Kucherena told me that Snowden had not intended to seek asylum in Russia when he arrived on June 23. Since he also said he had not met Snowden prior to July 12th, I asked how he knew Snowden's intentions.

"When I accepted the case, I received Snowden's dossier." He answered. "I was able to see all his interviews."

Presumably Snowden's dossier included his interviews with the FSB, SVR and other Russian security services. If so, it would explain how Kucherena could be so certain that Snowden had brought "material" with him to Russia that he had not provided to journalists in Hong Kong. Before meeting with Kucherena, I had met with Sophie Shevardnadze, the previously-mentioned grand-daughter of Politburo member Edward Shevardnadze and widely-followe3d television journalist. She told me that Kucherena had personally approved the translation of the interview into English. So I asked Kucherena about his 2013 interview with her, which was the last interview he had given about Snowden. It will be recalled that in response to a question about whether Snowden had secret material with him in Russia, Kucherena had said "certainly." Was this exchange accurate?

"It was accurate," he answered.

Snowden himself had said in Hong Kong that he had only given journalists some of the state secrets he had stolen and that he deemed others too sensitive for journalists. So I sought to find out from Kucherena which documents Snowden had taken to Russia. I went about it in a roundabout way. When Shevardnadze asked him about the secret material Snowden had might reveal in Russia, Kucherena pointedly called her attention to Snowden's CIA service, suggesting that he might possess CIA files. I also knew that in his roman a clef novel which Oliver Stone had optioned for $1 million, he had Joshua Frost, the thinly veiled Snowden-based character, steal a vast number of CIA documents that could do great damage to U.S. intelligence. By retaining them, Frost made himself a prime target of the CIA. So I asked "Is Joshua Frost fact or fiction?"

"I can't tell you that," he said, "If I said he was Snowden it would violate the attorney client privilege."

"I understand," I persisted, "But did Snowden do what Frost did in your book."

"That is for you to decide," he answered with a sly smile. "It's my first novel."

When I asked if he could arrange for me to see Snowden, he said that first I would have to first submit my questions to Ben Wizner, Snowden's American lawyer. He made it clear to me that the exposure of Snowden to journalists, or at least the vetting of journalists, had been outsourced to Wizner, "After that the final decision is up to Snowden," he said. That seemed to conclude the interview but, as I got up to leave, he added, "His legal defense is fairly expensive and Snowden is running out of money."

I was intrigued by this parting remark. Snowden, as far as I knew, didn't need a legal defense because he was not charged with a crime in Russia and the United States had no extradition treaty with Russia. But I asked, "Could I make a contribution to his defense fund?"

"It would be greatly appreciated," he said, "We will supply you with instructions to wire the money to our bank."

"How much should I send?"

"That's up to you," he said, getting up to walk me to the door. "I should add for the record that the contribution will not influence Snowden's decision to see you."

"I will send the wiring instructions" Valentina said as I left. "I hope you come back to Moscow."

While Kucherena did not arrange an interview with Snowden, as I had hoped, he did something I considered more important. He confirmed the accuracy of his September 2013c assertion that Snowden had brought secret material to Russia; material he had not given to journalists in Hong Kong. After what I learned from Cherkashin about the lengths that Russian intelligence would go to obtain U.S. communications intelligence secrets, I viewed Snowden's access to this material to be a crucially important part of the mystery.

As for Snowden, I would send my questions to Ben Wizner and, if he and Snowden approved them, I would fly back to Moscow. But I decided that I was not going to send money to Kucherena— or to Snowden.

PART SIX

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Snowden's Choices

"It is the choices we make that show who we truly are"

J.K Rowling, the Philosopher's Stone

Whereas Russian authorities had the opportunity to thoroughly debrief Snowden as to his motive for stealing state secrets, US authorities did not have that opportunity (and it seems unlikely that they will have it in the foreseeable future.) So Snowden's motive is a missing part of the puzzle. It also cannot even be assumed that he had a single consistent motive during the nine-month course of his illicit copying of documents. Snowden has shown, if nothing else, that he is adaptable. He may have began taking documents for one reason and found other reasons as he proceeded in his quest. Many of the circumstances of his probes, contacts, theft and escape remain disputed by his supporters and shrouded by the secrecy of the NSA. What we do know is that Snowden made four extraordinary choices during the nine month period in 2013 that speak to the concerns that may have guided his actions. In the case of a classified intelligence breach, as in a chess game, the sequence of moves a player makes provides an important clue to his strategy.

The first move that Snowden made in preparation of the Level 3 breach was switching jobs on March 15th 2013. Snowden chose to leave his job as a system administrator at Dell SecureWorks to take job at Booz Allen as an analyst-in-training. His motive was not money, as it was a lower-paying position. At the time, he made this choice he had already set up an encrypted channel with Laura Poitras for the purpose of sending her secret material. But he did not have to change jobs to send her secrets. So what was his purpose in making this fateful choice?

The job change was not necessary to expose NSA domestic activities. If he had only wanted to be a whistle-blower, there were ample documents about the NSA's activities already available to him on the NSANet. He also had access at Dell to the administrative file which contained the FISA court orders issued every three months to Verizon. In addition, as the NSA's damage assessment established, before switching jobs Snowden had already taken most of the documents pertaining to the NSA's domestic operations that he could have supplied to Poitras and Greenwald for whistle-blowing purposes. Indeed, while still at Dell, it will be recalled, he had he had told Poitras he had a copy of Presidential Policy Directive 20, a document in which President Obama authorized the NSA to tap into fiber cables crossing the United States. Snowden described it to her as "a kind of martial law for cyber operations, created by the White House." True, he took a more recently-issued FISA warrant and PRISM presentation in April after switching jobs, but he could have just as easily taken the January 2013 version of the FISA warrant from the administrative file of Dell. It would have had the same explosive effect in the media.

Nor did he switch jobs to lessen the risk of getting caught. He actually put himself in far greater jeopardy by switching jobs. At Dell he was relatively safe from apprehension since he could take documents, such as the above-mentioned Presidential Policy Directive 20, from access points at the NSA shared by many of his peers. Since these shared access points provided the equivalent of a common reading room at a library, it would be difficult to trace the theft of any documents taken from them to a particular user. Indeed, if he just wanted to expose the NSA's domestic operations, he could have done the entire operation at Dell. He even could have sent Poitras documents anonymously over his own TOR software and server. And he could have remained in his self-described “paradise” in Hawaii with his girl friend.

Yet he chose to move to Booz Allen he also greatly increased the risk of exposure because the auditing system at Booz Allen could trace back unauthorized copying (though not in real time.) Presumably he knew, as he later told Greenwald and Poitras, that stealing documents at the Booz Allen job meant that he would either go to prison or escape from America. He didn’t want to face prison time, so the job change required an escape plan. In keeping with the latter option, only about a week after he started work at the Booz Allen-managed facility, he submitted a request for a medical leave of absence.

We can safely assume that the reason for him to make this risky switch in employment was because he wanted something beyond the whistle-blowing documents. He wanted now to get documents that were not available at the Dell job. One such document he took was the top-secret *Congressional Budget Justification Book for Fiscal Year 2013.* This “black budget,” as it is called in Congress, contained the entire Intelligence Community’s priorities for, among other things, monitoring the activities of potential adversaries and terrorist organizations. It specified the money requested by not only the NSA, but the CIA, DIA, National Reconnaissance Office and other intelligence services. Snowden could not have considered the budget illegitimate, since is duly approved by both houses of Congress and the President. Nor could he objected to its secrecy since he himself had sworn oaths to protect all classified documents to which he was privy for the past eight years. If it was not for purposes of whistle-blowing, presumably he had another purpose for taking such a document. It certainly held value to other actors. “For our enemies, having it is like having the playbook of the opposing NFL team,” said CIA Deputy Director Morell in 2015. “I guarantee you that the SVR, the Russian foreign intelligence service, would have paid millions of dollars for such a document.” Unlike Ames, Hanssen and Pelton, Snowden was not after money. He sought documents that enhanced his power and importance.

He made no secret of this part of his motive after he got safely to Hong Kong. As will be recalled in answer to a question from the journalist Lana Lam about his motive for changing jobs, he answered that he took the Booz Allen job to get access to secret lists that were not available to him by working for Dell. These documents certainly increases his value to other nations since they included Level 3 lists revealing the NSA’s sources in Russia, China and other foreign countries.

Snowden also wanted more than NSA secrets. He used his new position, and widened access at Booz Allen, to go after secret documents from the intelligence services of Britain, Australia. New Zealand and Israel He revealed this operation only after receiving sanctuary in Russia. He told an interviewer that by moving to his new Booz Allen job as an infrastructure analyst he gained the ability to pry secrets out of the allied of the NSA. “I had a special level of clearance, called ‘Priv Ac’,” he said. This “priv ac” status, he further explained, allowed him to request files from other services cooperating with U.S. intelligence. By way of example, he described one file from the British GCHQ cipher service that he copied, stole and provided to other parties. It exposed a legally-authorized British operation to collect electronic data on terrorist matters in Pakistan by tapping into Cisco routers used by telecom companies in Asia. This GCHQ operation, as he himself recognized, violated neither British nor American law. He told a BBC interviewer in regard to that file:”What's scariest is not what the government is doing that's unlawful, but what they're doing that is completely lawful.” So his criteria for taking such documents were not their illegality. Nor did the fact they were lawful actions stop him from taking highly-sensitive GCHQ documents referring to them. In his five weeks at this Booz Allen job, he also used this same newly-acquired "Priv Ac" at the NSA to steal files from the Israeli, Canadian and Australian intelligence services.

Jumping from one outside contracting firm to another for the purpose of penetrating other/r western intelligence services is not the conventional mission of a whistle-blowing. In the parlance of intelligence operations, an employee of an intelligence service who changes his jobs\ solely to steal the more valuable secrets of services is called an "expanding penetration."

It is not possible to believe that Snowden did not know the damage that the highly-sensitive documents he was taking from the NSA and its allies. Even if they did not reveal any unlawful American activities, could do immense damage to Western intelligence. Indeed, he said as much once he got to Moscow. In respect to China alone, he told James Risen, the New *York Times'* national security reporter, in October 2013 that he had had "access to every [NSA] target, every [NSA] active operation" that could turn out the NSA's "lights" in China. He no doubt assumed that he had the same power to close down the NSA's operations in Russia.

His choice to switch jobs did not come out of the blue. It was not based on serendipitously discovering the documents after he began working at Booz Allen. . It was a carefully calculated move. As he told Lana Lam, he knew in advance that by switching to the job at Booz Allen he would gain the opportunity to take the lists of NSA sources. He knew that the NSA' secretive National Threat Operations Center's chief business was, as its name suggests, countering direct threats from China, Russia and other adversary states, and that, to deal with these threats, the NSA had used sophisticated methods to hack into the computers of adversaries. The NSA was even able to remotely gain entry to adversary computers that were not hooked into a network. "It's no secret that we hack China very aggressively," Snowden later said from Moscow. He had a planned target: getting the lists of the enemy computers that the NSA hacked into.

He also knew he was undertaking s a dangerous enterprise. He would tell Poitras in Hong Kong that the NSA would literally "kill" to protect their secrets. He also said he could be seized in a rendition operation by the CIA in Hong Kong. He even foresaw the probability that he "would be in an orange jumpsuit, super-max prison in isolation or Guantanamo."

He knowingly chose this course, despite the possibility of assassination or imprisonment, presumably because he believed the value of the secrets he would obtain by switching jobs outweighed the risk of imprisonment. Part of his calculus might have been the belief that the NSA lists, GCHQ documents and other material in his possession could give him great leverage, if he chose to exert it, in his future dealings with intelligence services (including the NSA.) If so, his choice to widen his access was also a choice to empower himself.

The second choice of consequence that Snowden made was to make Hong Kong his first stop. He had many other options. He could have remained in America, as almost all previous whistle-blowers in the past had chosen to do. If he did that, he would have to make his case in court (and, in that case, the level 3 documents he took might have been retrieved before they fell into unauthorized hands.) He could have also chosen to make a cross-border escape to a country that did not have an active extradition treaty with the United States. He could have, for example, taken a direct flight to Brazil, which has no extradition treaty with the United States. Brazil also had the advantage of being the home country of Glenn Greenwald, the journalist who he wanted to break the whistle-blowing story. As Greenwald seemed (at least to Snowden) hesitant to travel

12 times zones away to meet an anonymous source, Brazil also would have been a more certain place to meet Greenwald. If some consideration by Snowden precluded Brazil as a destination, Snowden could have also gone to Ecuador, Bolivia, Cuba, Iceland, or Venezuela, which are also countries that do not have active extradition treaties with the United States. Yet, instead of proceeding to a country from which he could not have been extradited, he flew to Hong Kong, which had a vigorously enforced extradition agreement.

His reason for choosing was not to keep a previously arranged rendezvous with a journalist. As previously mentioned, when he left Hong Kong not a single journalist had agreed to meet him in Hong Kong. Indeed, Gellman considered Hong Kong, as he put it, "in the jurisdiction of a country that's unfriendly to the United States," and notified Snowden that he would not be able to journey to Hong Kong. Yet, even without any appointments with journalists, he chose to fly to Hong Kong. So his choice was not based on either evading extradition or on accommodating journalists.

He chose Hong Kong for another reason. He told Greenwald Hong Kong, as a part of China, could provide him protection from any countermeasures by U.S. intelligence agencies. He made that consideration clear, saying that that Snowden's "first priority was to ensure his physical safety from US interference." Hong Kong "was part of China's territories, he [Snowden] reasoned, and American agents would find it harder to operate there than other places," according to Greenwald. Snowden further reckoned that China's control over Hong Kong prevented "American agents from breaking down the door" of the hotel room and from seizing him. Tyler Drumheller, a former CIA station chief, told me that Snowden was correct in his assessment of that Hong Kong advantage. Drumheller said that Hong Kong was "home court" for the Chinese intelligence services. It played a: dominant role" in running the police, airport passport control and security regime there. According to Drumheller, this reality limited the role that American and British intelligence operatives could play there and Snowden would be protected in Hong Kong against an intrusion by America. "Snowden obviously knew this from his training at the CIA," Drumheller said.

As the Chinese service was under no such restrictions, Snowden had gained protection at a price. While no US or British intelligence operatives would be in a position to retrieve the NSA files he had brought with him to Hong Kong, Chinese operatives, and their allies in the intelligence war, would have a free hand in Hong Kong. Yet, Snowden chose to put his physical safety in the hands of China.

One reason why Snowden may not have been overly concerned about Hong Kong's extradition treaty with the U.S. was that he had never intended to test it by staying in Hong Kong after his media events. Snowden told the editor of the *Guardian* from the safety of Moscow, Hong Kong was only a temporary stop over. He added in the interview that allowing himself to become part of an extradition proceeding in the Hong Kong court was not part of his plan. If so, the Hong Kong lawyers, who believed they had been retained *pro bono* to battle against extradition, were part of a charade. Hong Kong merely was a protected stopover. The stopover may have provided him with a further advantage. If he had gone directly to his next destination, Moscow, and he provided the same journalists with the same documents at a press conference in Moscow, his status as a whistle-blower might have been viewed with less sympathy in the media. Even the *Guardian*, for example, might have been reluctant to publish a Moscow-based story revealing British and American communications intelligence secrets, The third choice Snowden made, and the choice that most effectively defined him to the public, was to reveal himself as the man behind the leak in a video in Hong Kong. He not only identified himself as the person who stole the government documents published by the *Guardian* and *Washington Post*, but he incriminated himself further on camera by allowing Poitras to film him actually disclosing NSA's secret operations to Greenwald. By disclosing classified data to Greenwald, an unauthorized person, he intentionally burned his bridges.

What makes this choice intriguing is that there was no evident need for him to expose himself in this way. If he merely wanted to be a whistle-blower, he could have, as Bradley Manning did, anonymously sent the documents to journalists as "Citizen 4." In fact, in late May 2013, that was exactly what he did. He sent Barton Gellman the PRISM scoop anonymously which the *Washington Post* published on June 6th, 2013. In that scoop, Snowden's name was not revealed. He also sent Greenwald and Poitras documents while he was still the anonymous source "Citizen 4." Neither Gellman nor Greenwald had suggested the need for a face-to-face meeting with Snowden. Even after he had revealed his true identity to Poitras and Greenwald on June 2nd 2013, *Guardian* editor Ewen MacAskill offered him the option of remaining an unnamed source for the stories. He said, as he later told *Vanity Fair*. "You should remain anonymous; the stories are just as good without you." However, anonymity was not part of Snowden's long game.

The reason he gave Greenwald in Hong Kong for going public in this way was to avoid any suspicion falling on his co-workers at the NSA. Yet, if merely wanted to take sole responsibility for stealing state secrets, he did not need to be the subject of a documentary. He could have simply allowed Greenwald to identify him by name as the source in the stories. That would not present an issue since he had not been identified by either name or position in the initial stories published on June 5th and 6th by Greenwald, Poitras and Gellman. In short, he did not act to defect suspicion from his co-workers for the initial investigation. Why now?

The one thing that Snowden could not accomplish by anonymously transferring the documents to journalists was a starring role in the drama. If he had appeared digitally-masked in Poitras' video with an altered voice, he would not achieve fame in the media. For that, he needed to allow Poitras to film him committing the crime of turning over NSA documents to Greenwald. This video was also the result of his advanced planning. Indeed, one reason he chose Poitras was that she was a prize-winning/ documentary film-maker who had already made a documentary about NSA whistle-blower William Binney. Snowden, while he was still working at the NSA in March 2013, made it clear how he intended to use Poitras' film-making skills. He told her: "My personal desire is that you paint the target directly on my back."

He chose to make himself the on-camera star of a 20-hour long reality show. This sensational footage would transform him in the public's mind into a selfless hero. It would be a mistake to assume that the central role he gave himself was an exercise in narcissism. It was an integral part of his personal transformation. After this globally-watched video, he was no longer a near non-entity servicing a computer system at a back-water NSA base in Hawaii. In the space of 12 minutes on television, he had emerged from the shadowy world of electronic intelligence and became one of the most famous whistle-blowers in modern history. It was a mantle that would allow him to also become a leading advocate of privacy and encryption rights as well the leading opponent of NSA spying. While this remarkable transformation may not have been his entire motive, it certainly was the result of the choice he made to go public.

The final choice he was made to board a non-stop flight to Moscow on June 23, 2013. To remain in Hong Kong once a criminal complaint was leveled against him would have meant that, at the very minimum, Hong Kong authorities would seize him and the alleged stolen property of the US government in his possession. Even if he was released on bail, the Hong Kong authorities would almost certainly retain all the NSA and GCHQ files he had gone to such lengths to steal. He also would not be allowed to leave Hong Kong and possibly denied any access to the Internet. As he demonstrated by his subsequent actions, this option was not acceptable to him.

Once the U.S. criminal complaint was unsealed on June 21, 2013, which became all but inevitable after his video, his only route out of Hong Kong went through two adversaries of the United States, China and Russia. China, as far as is known, did not offer him sanctuary. According to one U.S diplomat, it may have already obtained copies of Snowden's NSA files, and did not want the problem of having Snowden defect to Beijing. In any case, if it had not already acquired the files. It could assume it would receive that intelligence data from its Russian ally in the intelligence war. Whatever its reason, China did not use its considerable power in Hong Kong to block Snowden's exit.

Nor did Snowden obtain a visa to any country in Latin America or elsewhere during his month-long stay in Hong Kong. As in the oft-cited Sherlock Holmes' clue of the dog that did not bark, Snowden's lack of any visas in his passport strongly suggests that he had not made plans to go anyplace but where he went: Moscow. His actions here, including his contacts with Russian officials in Hong Kong, speak louder than his words.

Snowden chose, if he had any choice left at all, the Russian option. Just as he believed Chinese intelligence could protect him in Hong Kong from the United States, he could assume that the FSB could protect him in Moscow from the United States. He was not entirely na* ve about its capabilities. During his service in the CIA, he had taken a month-long training course at the CIA's "farm" at Fort Peary in which counterintelligence officer taught about the capabilities the Russian security services

To be sure, he might not have known that Moscow would be his final destination. He may have naively believed that Russia would allow a defector from the NSA who claimed to have had access to the NSA's sources in Russia and China leave Moscow before its security services obtained that information. But that was not to be.

It is not uncommon for a defector to change sides in order to find a better life for himself in another country. Some defectors flee to escape a repressive government or to find one in which they believe they are more closely attuned. But Russia is ordinarily not the country of choice for someone such as Snowden seeking greater civil liberties and personal freedom. So why did Snowden choose Russia for his new life?

The four choices that Snowden made in 2013 did not come out of the blue. They all were planned out well in advance. He applied for the job to Booz Allen in February 2013, more than a month before leaving his job at Dell. He applied to Booz Allen for his medical leave, although in fact he had no medical problem, a month before departing for Hong Kong. He brought with him to Hong Kong enough cash to pay his living expenses, according to him, for the next two years. He arranged the encrypted channel with Poitras in February 2013, three months before he would induce her to come to Hong Kong. He made contact with a foreign diplomatic mission at least a month before flying to Moscow and, at some point, met with Russian officials, who arranged a visa-less entry for him. He called Assange in London to arrange for Wikileaks help, 13 days before departing to Moscow, and Assange accommodated him by laying down a smoke screen of decoy flights to facilitate his escape from Hong Kong and sending him a helper.

Taken together, these actions show that Snowden was determined to succeed where others before him had failed. He not only wanted to take full credit for stealing files from the NSA but he wanted to escape any American retribution for his act. His decision suggests to me a highly-intelligent, carefully calculating man who was hell-bent on finding a new life for himself in a foreign country. There is a common thread that runs through these four choices. It is a willingness to do whatever was necessary to achieve this new life, including disregarding his oath to protect secrets and instead transporting them on thumb drives to a foreign country. To protect himself, he was also willing to rely on the influence of an adversary intelligence services in Hong Kong and put himself of the hands of Russian authorities in Moscow. He also was willing to use some of his classified documents as a medium of exchange, if not bait, with journalist to get the public attention he sought. These choices paid off for him. The video presentation he partly authored changed his status in the eyes of the public from a document-stealer to whistle blower. Against all odds, Snowden succeeded in transforming himself from a low-level computer technician working, without any public recognition at the NSA into an internationally-acclaimed spokesman against the NSA's surveillance. And in Moscow, he could enjoy a safe life, free from the threats of a CIA rendition team dropping from the sky or extradition proceedings. He was now under the protection of Putin's Russia. As far as Snowden was concerned, as he told Gellman of the *Washington Post* on December 21, 2013 in Moscow, "The mission's already accomplished."

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

The Whistle Blower Who Became a Controlled Source

"The [U.S.] government's investigation failed—that they don't know what was taken"

—Edward Snowden in Moscow

In Moscow I had learned that Russian intelligence services use the broad, umbrella term "espionage source" to describe moles, volunteers and anyone else who delivers another state's secrets to it. It applies not only to documents but to the secret knowledge that such a source is able to recall and includes both controlled and uncontrolled bearers of secrets. It is also a job description that fitted Edward Snowden in June 2013.

Unless one is willing to believe that the Putin regime acted out of purely altruistic motives in exfiltrating this American intelligence worker to Moscow, the only plausible explanation for its actions in Hong Kong was that it valued Snowden's potential as an espionage source. Snowden's open disillusionment with the NSA presented the very situation that the Russian intelligence services specialized in exploiting. He had also revealed to reporters in Hong Kong that he had deliberately gained access to the NSA's sources and methods and he that he had taken to Hong Kong highly-classified documents. He further disclosed that, before leaving the NSA, he had gained access to the lists of computers that the NSA had penetrated in foreign countries. He even went so far as to describe to these journalists the secrets that he had taken as a "single point of failure" for the NSA. And aside from the documents he had copied, he claimed, it will be recalled, that he had secret knowledge in his head that, if disclosed would wreak havoc on the entire U.S. foreign intelligence system. "If I were providing information that I know, that's in my head, to some foreign government, the US intelligence community would … see sources go dark that were previously productive, he told the editor of the *Guardian* in Moscow.

In short, he advertised possessing precisely the priceless data that the Russian intelligence services had been seeking, with little success, for the past six decades. These electronic files could provide it with the keys to unlock the NSA's entire kingdom of electronic spying. Could any world-class intelligence service ignore such a prize? To miss the opportunity to gets in hands such a potential espionage source would be nothing short of gross negligence.

In fact, as has been already established in these pages, this golden opportunity was not missed in Hong Kong. Even if the Russian intelligence service had not previously had him in its sights – which, as discussed in chapter XV, appears to me to be extremely unlikely-- he made contact with Russian officials in Hong Kong, and Putin, as he himself said, personally approved allowing

Snowden to come to Russia. Putin's s decision no doubt set in motion the operation to exfiltrate him on Aeroflot, the state-controlled airline.

We know that the Russian government acted in advance to facilitate Snowden's trip from Hong Kong. Without such an intervention, it would not be possible for an American without an entry visa to Russia, or, for that matter, any other country to check-in and board an Aeroflot flight to Moscow. Aeroflot had to be instructed to allow Snowden on the plane without a visa. We also know that a special operation was mounted to take Snowden off the plane once it landed in Moscow. Such an operation could not have been done without advance planning. Nor would he be removed from the plane without a plan for his stay in Russia. Since Putin himself has taken credit for authorizing Snowden's trip to Russia, there is no reason to doubt that these plans, and whatever cover stories were deemed necessary, were approved at the highest level of the regime.

When an intelligence service makes such elaborate preparations for extracting a foreign intelligence worker, it presumably also expects to debrief him or her on arrival. Pelton, for example, who had access to far less valuable information than had Snowden, was held incommunicado in Vienna for two weeks during his debriefing. What would be inconceivable would be for an intelligence service to go to such lengths to bring a potential espionage source such as Snowden to Russia and allow him to catch the next plane to Latin America. The false report provided to the press that Snowden was flying to Latin America was likely nothing more than a cover story to confuse foreign observers while he was receiving his initial debriefing and evaluation.

When it comes to the esoteric enterprise of reconstructing the work of U.S. signals intelligence, military as well as civilian experts in cryptology, computer sciences and communications are necessary. Unlike in the case of Pelton, Snowden had secret material in his possession, at least according to Anatoly Kucherena. Even if Russian intelligence had already acquired copies of his electronic files prior to Snowden's arrival in Moscow, Snowden's interpretation of them would be part of the debriefing since intelligence data needs to put in context. "This debriefing could not be done overnight," according to a former high-ranking officer in the GRU, the Russian military intelligence service. "There is no way that Snowden would not be fully debriefed," he said. He also said GRU specialists in signal intelligence would be called in.

We know that the Putin regime paid a significant price in terms of the cancellation of the pre-Olympics summit with Obama. Having to accept the onus of declining relations with the Obama administration, it is hard to believe that it didn't attempt to get the bonus of signals intelligence from Snowden. The GRU, SVR and other Russian intelligence services would not be denied the opportunity to y question Snowden until to all they had squeezed out of him whatever state secrets he had or knew during the 38 days that he had vanished from public sight. Since Snowden was rewarded with sanctuary, a residence and body guards, there is no reason to doubt that he satisfactorily accommodated his interrogators. While he might elect to continue believing that he a whistle-blower true to his ideals, as far as Russian intelligence was concerned, he was an espionage source. /

For an intelligence service, the game is not over when it obtains state secrets. It still needs to fog over the extent of its coup, as far as possible, to prolong the value of the espionage. Hence it is plausible that the story that Snowden had thoroughly destroyed all his data he stolen the prior month prior to departing for Russia as well as the story that he had turned down all requests to be questioned by the FSB and other Russian intelligence officials were part of his legend. The repetitions of these uncorroborated claims in his press interviews also may have enhanced his public image for the ACLU effort to get clemency for him. Even so, in view of the importance of such communication intelligence to Russia, it would be the height of naiveté for U.S. or British intelligence to accept such claims as anything more than part of the cover story.

As for the Snowden's motive, I see no reason to doubt Snowden's explanation that he stole NSA documents to expose NSA surveillance that he believed was an illicit intrusion into the privacy of individuals. Such disaffection is not a unique situation in the intelligence business. Many of Russia's espionage sources before Snowden were also dissatisfied employees who had access to classified secrets. Like some of them, Snowden used his privileged access to blow the whistle on what he considered to be the improper activities of the organization for which he worked. In that sense, I fully accept that he began as a whistle-blower, not as a spy. It was also as a whistle-blower that he contacted Laura Poitras, Glenn Greenwald and Barton Gellman, who published the scoops he provided in the *Guardian, Der Spiegel* and *Washington Post,*

Snowden's penetration went beyond whistle-blowing, however. He copied a vast number of electronic files, including the level 3 files that contained the NSA's most sensitive sources and methods. While these files had little, if anything, to do with domestic surveillance or whistle-blowing, they gave him the sense of power he demonstrated in asserting that he could make all of U.S. communication intelligence "go dark" all over the world. We know from Kucherena that he did not share part of data with journalists. Instead, he took it to Russia.

As far as carrying out the most damaging part of the operation, he could not have acted entirely alone. It will be recalled that the deepest part of his penetration was during the five weeks he worked at the National Threat Operations Center in Hawaii as a contract employee of Booz Allen Hamilton. It was there that he copied level 3 files, including the so-called road map to the gaps in American intelligence. During this period, as discussed in Chapter III, Snowden had neither the passwords nor system administrator's privileges that would allow him to copy, transfer and steal the electronic files. He therefore must have obtained that assistance from some who had the passwords and privileges. Even if that reality does not sit well with the NSA administration, there is no reason to assume that Snowden was the only disgruntled employee at that NSA facility in 2013. That a dozen or so NSA co-workers attended his anti-surveillance Crypto party in 2012 shows that others shared his sensibilities and antipathy towards NSA surveillance. It therefore seems plausible to me that he found a co-worker willing to cooperate, or vice versa, a co-worker found him. To be sure, Snowden might not have been aware of his new accomplice's true motives or affiliations. But without some co-worker providing him with entry to the sealed-off computers, he could not have carried out the penetration. To our knowledge, whoever helped him evidently did not want to expose himself to prosecution or defect from the NSA. That was Snowden's role. By accepting the sole blame in the video that Poitras made about him in Hong Kong, Snowden shielded anyone else from suspicion, which was, as he told Poitras, his purpose, Whoever helped him may still be working at the NSA.

To be sure, there remains another glaring gap in the chain of events that led Snowden to Moscow: his whereabouts and activities during his first eleven days in Hong Kong. Mike Rogers, the chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, even speculated that Snowden might have been taken to mainland China during this period. What drove his speculation was the admission of U.S. intelligence that, despite its vast global resources for searching credit card charges, banking transactions, hotel registrations, emails, police records and even CCTV cameras, neither it, nor its allies, were able to find a trace of Snowden. It was, in a phrase later made famous by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. "A known unknown." Yet there provided no basis to speculate that he was in mainland China. He could have been staying in a well-prepared safe-house anywhere in Hong Kong or even at the home of an unknown associate. All that is really known is that soon after he emerged from this venue and gave his celebrated interview to journalist he was aboard an Aeroflot plane bound for Moscow where he would become, if he was already, a potential espionage source for Russia.

Whatever his initial motivation may have been, Snowden's actions would appear squarely at odds with his assertions of serving his country's interests. Even accepting that he began with a sincere desire to be a world-class whistleblower, his mission evolved, deliberately or not, into one that led him to disclose key communications intelligence secrets to a foreign power with an agenda that can hardly be aligned with his country's interests. In the end, it is Snowden's actions, not his words that matter.

EPILOGUE

THE SNOWDEN EFFECT

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Consequences for the ‘War on Terrorism’ “

“Because of a number of unauthorized disclosures and a lot of hand-wringing over the government’s role in the effort to try to uncover these terrorists, there have been some policy and legal and other actions that make our ability collectively, internationally, to find these terrorists much more challenging.”

CIA Director John Brennan in response to the Paris attack, November 2015

In the evening of November 13, 2015, normal life in Paris was brought to a screeching halt by nine Jihadist terrorists acting on behalf of ISIS. Three blew themselves up at the stadium at Saint-Denis, where President Hollande was attending a match between France and Germany, while the others shot killed 130 people at cafes, restaurants and a theater. 388 others had been wounded in the carnage. The attack was planned over many months by Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a 28-year old Belgium citizen of Moroccan origins, who served ISIS as a logistics officer in Syria in 2014. To organize the attack, he smuggled three suicide bombers into Europe through Greece, raise financing, set up a base in the Molenbeek section of Brussels, import deactivated assault weapons from Slovenia (which then had to be restored by a technician), buy ammunition, acquire suicide vests, obtain “burner” cell phones, rent cars and make on-line bookings for quarters in Paris for the nine attackers.. Even though Abaaoud was well known to western intelligence services, none of the communications surrounding the preparations for the attack came to the attention of the NSA or its allied services in Europe.

Those Paris attackers who did not kill themselves with their suicide vests were killed by the police, but the real challenge in such a terrorist operation is not bringing culprits to justice after the massacre civilians. It is preventing them from carrying it out. As “soft targets,” such as restaurants, cafes, theaters and street gatherings, cannot be continually protected by police, the only practical means by which a government can prevent such attacks is to learn in advance about their planning and preparations. One means of acquiring this information is by listening in on the channels through which members of loosely-knit terrorists organizations, such as ISIS, communicates with one another. This form of intelligence-gathering obviously works best so long as the terrorists remain unaware that the communication channels they are using are being monitored. Once they find out that their messages and conversations are being intercepted, they will likely find a safer means to communicate important information. For that reason, communications intelligence organizations keep the sources and methods they employ for monitoring these channels in a tightly-sealed envelope of secrecy.

Yet, in June 2013, the NSA found that envelope had been breached by Snowden who deliberately compromised three programs that it used to keep track of terrorist organizations around the world. The first system he divulged, and the one which though it received the most public attention, did the least damage, was what the NSA called the 215 program because it had been authorized by section 215 of the Patriot Act of 2001. This program amassed, the billing records of every phone call made in America that could be used as a data base by the FBI. The idea was that when any foreigner on the FBI's watch list of terrorists called anyone in the U.S. the FBI could trace that person's entire chain of telephone contacts to try to determine if he was connected to a terrorist cell. There was, however, a major flaw in this program: it did not cover e-mail and other Internet messaging, which 2013 had largely replaced telephone calls. In addition, terrorist organizations had become fully aware of the vulnerability of telephoning overseas. So although the NSA could cite a handful of early successes that "215" yielded, Snowden's exposure of it did only limited damage/

But Snowden did not stop with "215." He next did vastly more damage by exposing the PRISM program also called "702" since it was authorized in 2007 by section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.) Since a large part of the fiber cables on which the world's Internet runs pass through the United States, the NSA was able to intercept 91 percent of its data, including Google searches, social media postings, Skype conversations, messages on Xbox Live, Instant messaging services, tweets on Twitter and e-mails. The CIA and FBI could then track the movements of foreign terrorists. Up until June 6, 2014, terrorist groups presumably were unaware of the NSA's capacity to vacuum in even encrypted parts of the Internet since they used it for their lethal planning. This ignorance gave U.S intelligence an important edge in pre-empting terrorist actions. According to the testimony of General Alexander, data intercepted under PRISM helped detect and thwart no fewer than 45 terrorist attacks prior to Snowden's making this capability known.

The third NSA program of interest to Jihadists that Snowden revealed was called XKeyscore. Using Internet data from PRISM, it created the equivalent of digital fingerprints for suspected foreign terrorists based on their search patterns on the Internet. This made it difficult for a terrorist suspect to hide on the Internet. He might attempt to evade surveillance by using a different computer and another name but, unknown to him, the XKeyscore algorithms would continue to track him under his new alias.

To even further enable furtive Internet users evade surveillance, Snowden provided in an interview specific data about the secret sources and methods used both the NSA and British GCHQ. He revealed, for example that the GCHQ had deployed the first "full-take" Internet interceptor that "snarfs everything, in a rolling buffer to allow retroactive investigation without missing a single bit." When asked how to circumvent it, he replied: "you should never route through or peer with the UK under any circumstances. Their fibers are radioactive, and even the Queen's selfies to the pool boy get logged." Aside from this warning about using Internet providers whose wiring passes through Britain, he also warned Internet users against using the services of American Internet companies since the NSA considered "telecom collaborators to be the jewels in their crown of omniscience. " Snowden also suggested that to avoid being automatically "targeted" by the NSA, one should avoid "jihadi forums." These tips for evading U.S. and British surveillance, far from being an off-hand leakage of information, were supplied by him in written answers to interrogatives sent to him by Laura Poitras and Jacob Appelbaum while Snowden was still on the NSA payroll in May 2013. If he intended to damage the NSA's ability to monitor unsuspecting individuals abroad, he clearly succeeded. Just as Robert Hanssen had compromised the NSA's interception of communication at the Soviet Embassy in the 1990s, Snowden compromised the NSA's interception of Jihadist targets on the Internet.

The Snowden intervention was soon felt by the CIA. "Within weeks of the leaks," writes Michael Morell, then CIA deputy director. He notes that "Terrorist organizations around the world were already starting to modify their actions in light of what Snowden disclosed. Communication sources dried up." What heightened Morell's concern about this loss of intelligence sources was the discovery a 26-page document on an ISIS computer in Syria indicating that the terrorist group had been considering using plague germs and other biological weapons on foreign targets. The NSA was also seeing the Snowden effect on the war on terrorists. In 2013, the FBI, CIA, and DIA had compiled a watch list of some 400 foreign terrorist targets for NSA's PRISM program. Up until June 6th, many of these targets frequently used Internet services, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Xbox live, to send what they believed would be hidden messages. After the PRISM story broke in the Washington Post on June 6th, the NSA "saw one after another target go dark," according to a senior executive involved in that surveillance. In 2014, Admiral Rogers, the new NSA director, was even blunter. Asked whether or not the disclosures by Snowden had reduced the NSA's ability to pursue terrorist, he answered: "Have I lost capability that we had prior to the revelations? Yes."

In Moscow, Snowden insists that not a single death has been traced back to his disclosures. I agree that it would be unfair to jump to the conclusion that he is responsible for any single event, such as the massacre in Paris in November 2015, because we cannot know whether or not a jihadist involved in the event, such as Abdelhamid Abaaoud in the case of Paris, would have used the Internet if Snowden had not exposed the interception of it by the NSA. But however sincere were his intentions, Snowden cannot escape his responsibility for his actions. He totally and purposefully compromised an intelligence operation that could prevent such villainous attacks.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

The Consequences for America: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

[TK]

END NOTES

Prologue

On The Trail of Snowden

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Snowden's Choices

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10.

APPENDEX A

SPIES AND ESPIONAGE SOURCES

[TK]

From: Richard Kahn [[redacted]]
Sent: 4/27/2018 8:25:30 PM
To: jeffrey E. [jeevacation@gmail.com]
Subject: Will Cohen Cooperate? Tenuous Finances May Provide Crucial Clues

Importance: High

shockingly it appears he has some money in real estate deals…

Will Cohen Cooperate? Tenuous Finances May Provide Crucial Clues
2018-04-27 08:00:00.2 GMT

By Shahien Nasiripour and Caleb Melby

(Bloomberg) -- In the two weeks since federal agents seized the files of Michael Cohen, President Donald Trump's personal attorney and fixer, a question has hovered: Will Cohen cooperate with investigators?

His decision could depend in part on whether he can readily shoulder the enormous legal fees required to fight a federal probe of this magnitude.

At first blush, Cohen looks like a pretty rich man. He drives a white Rolls Royce, sports a $50,000 watch and owns a fair amount of Manhattan real estate.

But just as his loyalty to Trump is coming under scrutiny, a more tenuous financial picture is emerging. A taxi business he and his wife built is deeply in debt and losing money daily, his commercial real estate is throwing off only modest income, and his legal and consulting work is on hold while he remains under investigation.

Cohen declined repeated requests to comment.

The owners of 32 New York City taxi licenses -- known as medallions -- he and his wife, Laura, took out at least 16 loans based on their once-soaring value, liens show. With the rise of Uber and Lyft, the price of a medallion has fallen from more than $1 million to around $163,000 in the past four years. Income from the taxi business has plummeted, and millions of dollars of the Cohens' loans went under water. Their bank said in a November public filing that it had loans out to three taxi borrowers, and all were at high risk of default.

Suspended Medallions

Unpaid taxes and fines have piled up at the Cohen taxi companies, triggering a suspension of about half of the medallions, city records show, squeezing cash flow.

Whatever monthly income the cabs once produced almost certainly fell well short of the debt payments owed to Sterling National Bank, their Montebello, New York-based lender. Sterling has foreclosed on operators in similar situations and sued them but appears to be taking a less-confrontational approach with the Cohens. On Tuesday, the bank agreed to new loans for their companies and to Cohen personally, public filings show. Sterling declined to comment.

The taxi business isn't the only part of Cohen's empire that's suffering. The law firm Squire Patton Boggs said it ended its "strategic alliance" with Cohen after law enforcement raided his offices, and the rest of his legal work could decline for the same reason. Cohen, 51, makes others' ugly problems disappear, a practice that was previously lucrative. Essential Consultants LLC, a company affiliated with Cohen, was paid $250,000 after he negotiated a $1.6 million payment to a former Playboy model on behalf of Republican National Committee official Elliott Broidy, according to a Wall Street Journal report.

Sean Hannity

Cohen has said in court that he had only three legal clients during the past year: Broidy, Trump and talk-show host Sean Hannity. He gave seven others "strategic advice and business consulting."

Last month Cohen said he borrowed from his home-equity credit line to make a $130,000 payment in October 2016 to Stormy Daniels, an adult-film star who says she had sex with Trump.

In a Thursday morning appearance on "Fox & Friends," Trump distanced himself from Cohen, saying he did only "a tiny, tiny little fraction" of Trump's legal work, but it included representation "on this crazy Stormy Daniels deal."

Russian Interference

Cohen is under investigation for bank fraud and violating campaign-finance law. But his decade at Trump's side as his lawyer and enforcer could yield information he might trade to investigators looking into the Trump campaign and Russia's interference in the U.S. election.

Still, if he chooses to defend himself, Cohen does have assets. Companies he signs for own two investment properties purchased in 2015. The larger one, with 92 units on New York's Upper East Side, is 38 percent owned by Cohen's companies. The businesses also appear to be the sole owner of a downtown building with 20 units.

Together they likely generate less than $1 million in annual net income for Cohen's companies after accounting for partner interests, expenses and financing costs, data compiled by Bloomberg show. Debt against the buildings is low, meaning that Cohen could tap them for cash. Last October, the Cohens sold a unit at Trump World Tower, near the United Nations, for $3.3 million.

Cohen has been a savvy property investor. He previously owned four buildings in need of repairs in Lower Manhattan, rehabilitated them and sold them for $32 million in 2014, more than doubling his initial investment.

'Cautious, Methodical'

Richard Guarino, a partner at Friedman-Roth Realty, has worked with Cohen on a handful of deals, including the purchase of his Upper East Side building. As a real estate investor, Cohen is "cautious, methodical, smart and, I think, conservative," Guarino says.

Cohen's current business partners are a family of New York real estate lawyers headed by Herbert Chaves. The family, having just sold a plot of Brooklyn land to a partnership including the family company of Jared Kushner, were looking to reinvest their gains when they bought Cohen's Lower Manhattan buildings in 2014. Months later, they partnered with Cohen to buy the Upper East Side property, 330 East 63rd Street. Guarino, a broker on the deal, says he dealt only with Cohen, who served as a representative for the investor group even though the Chaves family companies hold the majority stake.

Purchased for $58 million, the squat, brown-brick seven-story building has only a $17 million mortgage, meaning Cohen's share has at least $15 million of equity he could borrow against if his partners allowed him to do so. Another property at 133 Avenue D, not previously reported to be owned by Cohen, has at least $5 million of equity not tapped by a mortgage. But more debt means more risk and could hurt Cohen later if the taxi business doesn't turn around to help cover higher interest payments.

Park Avenue

One property that may prove harder to extract cash from: Cohen's palatial Park Avenue home. Purchased for $5 million in 2005, the sprawling 10th-floor unit used to be three separate apartments and has four bedrooms. It could be worth $8 million or more, based on comparable sales.

In late 2015, the Cohens moved the property into a type of trust designed to limit tax exposure when transferring property to heirs. The trust structure has tax consequences for typical mortgages, but those could be dodged if the Cohens took out an interest-only loan.

In February 2016, Laura Cohen, in her role as a trustee of the new entity, did just that, taking out a revolving $500,000 home-equity line of credit against the property from First Republic Bank. It was the first time the family had borrowed against the property since a loan of more than $2 million 11 years earlier when they bought it, property records show.

There are also Cohen's in-laws, who may pitch in to a legal-defense effort. Fima and Ania Shusterman, who haven't responded to requests for comment, emigrated from Ukraine and built their own taxi empire over decades while helping Cohen expand his across New York and Chicago. They own three units in Trump World Tower. In an indication of their willingness to help those close to them, the couple have lent $20 million to another Ukranian couple in the taxi business, Semyon and Yasya Shtayner and their companies.

Richard Kahn
HBRK Associates Inc.
575 Lexington Avenue 4th Floor
New York, NY 10022
tel [redacted]
fax [redacted]
cell [redacted]

From: Steve Bannon [[redacted]]
Sent: 7/22/2018 11:25:42 PM
To: jeffrey E. [jeevacation@gmail.com]
Subject: Fwd: Re:

Importance: High

Translation to follow

Begin forwarded message:

From: Benjamin Harnwell <[redacted]>
Date: July 22, 2018 at 4:32:45 PM EDT
To: Steve Bannon [redacted]>
Subject: Re:

It was that article in *La Repubblica* which you asked to be translated this afternoon.

In Sacratissimo Corde Iesu et Purissimo Corde Mariae et Castissimo Corde Ioseph.

****

Benjamin Harnwell
Founder and President of the Board of Trustees
Dignitatis Humanae Institute

Cell: [redacted]
Office: [redacted]

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www.dignitatishumanae.com

Il giorno 22 lug 2018, alle ore 22:21, Steve Bannon [redacted]> ha scritto:

Where is this

▪

On Jul 22, 2018, at 4:02 PM, Benjamin Harnwell <[redacted]> wrote:

Bannon the European: He's opening the populist fort in Brussels

The former Trump strategist arrives in Europe with "The Movement". Objective: an alliance between right-wing leaders, from Salvini to Orbán in view of the 2019 elections

NEW YORK. The invasion of Europe has begun. Steve Bannon, 65, the American far-right guru who was Donald Trump's right-hand man in the White House — but let go last summer following the racist violence in Charlottesville — is preparing to march on Brussels. Launching, he told the Daily Beast himself, a new non-profit foundation called The Movement, (Il Movimento), right in the heart of Europe and its institutions. Through which he hopes to coordinate the populist right in view of the European elections which will be held in spring 2019.

Objective: to compete with George Soros, the American billionaire of Hungarian origin, benefactor of the Democratic party, who since 1984 with his Open Society has spent at least $32 billion in support of NGOs dealing with human rights. And for this he became the bogeyman of the populist right, accused of plots of all kinds: including that of wanting to replace Italians with immigrants in order to have labour at low cost. A mantra repeated in the past on Twitter also by the current Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini.

The ambition of Steve Bannon, former director of the alt-right American site Breitbart — which in the European campaign preceded him since the platform had already opened bureaux in London and Rome — is therefore to become the coordinator of the one great "populist international" of which he has long since been dreaming.

The Movement, in fact, intends to function as an extreme right-wing think tank: a source of strategic advice to channel the not-so-politically structured discontent of the most extreme European movements. Analysing data and giving strategic advice. But also by raising funds and channeling funding.

The aim is to create a populist alliance, a sort of "super group" that if victorious can conquer up to a third of the European Parliament in the elections next May.

Indeed — putting the common policy of the Old Continent in the hands of Bannon and his own. The American strategist is very attached to the Freedom Caucus — the extreme right of the US Congress — and in 2014 he was at the top of the Cambridge Analytica company, which in 2016 used data stolen from Facebook to try to influence the presidential election from which Donald Trump emerged victor. It is not a mystery that for a long time he courts nationalists of the right from East to West. And he has already met, among others, the Hungarian Orbán, the French Marine Le Pen and the former leader of the British separatists Nigel Farage. The latter reappeared, coincidentally, on Friday in Pennsylvania, USA, to a fundraiser in favor of the Republican congressman Lou Barletta. Without forgetting the Italians of Lega and 5 stars. Of them, he said: "If it works in Italy, we can import the model anywhere".

The Movement, which for now will count on a staff of 10 people, will be fully operational in 2019. In short, after the American midterm elections, where Bannon is fighting to influence the primaries supporting candidates potentially able to undermine the prospects of Republican establishment. But in the future the former spin doctor says he wants to spend more and more time in Europe. Also because the relationships with Trump have worsened after the revelations he made to Michael Wolff and published in the scandal book "Fire and Fury". "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Paradise," Bannon says now

> paraphrasing the Satan of one of his favorite books, John Milton's Lost Paradise. Hell in this case would be the dear old Europe and its democratic values. The "army of darkness" is already among us.

In Sacratissimo Corde Iesu et Purissimo Corde Mariae et Castissimo Corde Ioseph.

****

Benjamin Harnwell
Founder and President of the Board of Trustees
Dignitatis Humanae Institute

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Il giorno 22 lug 2018, alle ore 15:38, Steve Bannon <[redacted]> ha scritto:

What does this say???

Begin forwarded message:

From: Maria Luisa <[redacted]>
Date: July 22, 2018 at 9:11:58 AM EDT
To: Steve Bannon <[redacted]>, Preate Alexandra <[redacted]>

<PHOTO-2018-07-22-10-02-17.jpg>

Sent from my iPhone

From: Steve Bannon [[redacted]
Sent: 8/27/2018 6:11:26 PM
To: jeffrey E. [jeevacation@gmail.com]
Subject: Fw: The ‘Deplorables’ Called Into Battle Again - WSJ

Importance: High

Sent via BlackBerry by AT&T

From: Alexandra Preate <[redacted]>
Date: Mon, 27 Aug 2018 10:37:29 -0400
To: Steve Bannon<[redacted]>
Subject: The ‘Deplorables’ Called Into Battle Again - WSJ

https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-deplorables-called-into-battle-again-1535376353?mod=mhp

The ‘Deplorables’ Called Into Battle Again

As midterms near, President Trump’s former political guru Steve Bannon rallies the troops

Gerald F. SeibAug. 27, 2018 9:25 a.m. ET

By
Gerald F. Seib

Steve Bannon doesn’t do subtle. So it’s no surprise that there’s nothing subtle about the new movie President Trump’s onetime political guru has produced to energize the Trump base for this year’s midterm elections.

It’s entitled “Trump at War,” and it’s an hour and 15 minutes of pure Trumpian adrenaline. It opens with a series of shots of Trump supporters being attacked by angry opponents, shifts to outtakes of Trump supporters proudly accepting the “deplorables” label bestowed by Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign, runs through a long series of angry ripostes at Trump detractors and praise of administration policy moves, and closes with dire warnings of the need to vote for Republicans in 2018 to head off efforts by liberals to impeach the president.

Mr. Bannon previewed the film for some Republican supporters in Dallas recently, but the big premiere is scheduled for Sept. 9—chosen because it is the second anniversary of the speech in which Mrs. Clinton used the “basket of deplorables” phrase. The location? The very club in Manhattan where Mrs. Clinton made the speech, which has been rented for the occasion.

Aside from what they say about Mr. Bannon as a political provocateur, the film and its unveiling also reveal a lot about how people in the president’s circle increasingly see this year’s midterm election: Its importance is growing every day; Republican success starts with turning out core Trump supporters; and the best way to motivate them is by brandishing the fear of impeachment proceedings if Democrats win control of Congress.

Steve Bannon believes the specter of impeachment will motivate mainstream Republicans as well as core Trump backers. Photo: J. Scott Applewhite/Associated Press

“This is all grass roots,” Mr. Bannon says. “It’s 2016 all over again…This is Trump’s first re-election.”

The political calculus behind such thinking is pretty simple: In 19 months as president, Mr. Trump has hardened his grip on his base of supporters and the GOP overall, but has done little to expand that base.

Meanwhile, as the Labor Day kickoff of the fall campaign approaches, Republicans face a Democratic party whose activists appear exceptionally motivated—to campaign, donate money and turn out in November.

Republicans need something to match that fervor. That something is the Trump base—and the best motivating tools are anger and fear.

In this case, that means specifically the fear that Special Counsel Robert Mueller, New York prosecutors and a Democratic Congress will conspire to kick Mr. Trump out of office. That’s why Republicans are talking about the specter of impeachment, not Democrats. Democrats know impeachment talk is a surefire way to motivate the other side.

But there’s a problem in this GOP formula: A motivated Trump base is necessary for Republicans to head off disaster in November, but it’s not sufficient, at least not if Democrats remain as energized as they appear today. The Trump base has to be married with more mainstream Republicans—the kind hardcore activists refer to as RINOs, or “Republicans In Name Only”—and with some independent voters.

Right now, independent voters are hard to read. Their sentiments have been shifting around a lot in Wall Street Journal/NBC News polling in recent months. As a general rule, they have a low regard for Mr. Trump personally and appear weary of the atmosphere of constant crisis around him. But the polling also indicates they increasingly like how Republicans are handling the economy, appreciate the GOP tax cut and think the party is changing the way things work in Washington.

That leaves moderate Republicans, of whom Mr. Bannon says simply: “We need RINOs.”

Supporters of President Trump cheer before a rally in Lewis Center, Ohio, earlier this month. Photo: Carolyn Kaster/Associated Press

The Bannon calculation is that the specter of impeachment will motivate these soft Republicans as well as core Trump backers. More conventional Republicans may be disdainful of Mr. Trump personally, but they also think the tax cuts, deregulatory policies and judicial nominations they like are imperiled if he goes down.

So, impeachment-scare talk, Mr. Bannon is calculating, is effective for RINOS too, simply for different reasons. For the Trump base, impeachment talk is a source of outrage. Soft Republicans dislike it for less emotional, more practical reasons.

All this means Republican candidates have a dual mission right now: Keep motivating those base Trump voters, who want full-throated defenses of the president and odes to his hard-line immigration policies, while also luring out to the polls mainstream Republicans and independents who dislike the president but like lower taxes and less regulation.

And if political advertising is any indication, candidates appear to be embracing both messages with nearly equal fervor. Data compiled by CMAG Kantar Media on all political ads run so far this year show that a pro-Trump message is the most common element of GOP ads. Next in line? Mentions of the tax cut Republicans pushed through Congress last year.

Write to Gerald F. Seib at jerry.seib@wsj.com

Alexandra V. Preate
Chief Executive Officer
CapitalHQ
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From: [redacted] [triversr@gmail.com]
Sent: 10/11/2018 5:34:33 PM
To: Jeffrey Epstein [jeevacation@gmail.com]
Subject: Update
Attachments: PHOTOS.pptx; HONOR KILLINGS MS.doc

Importance: High

miss chatting with you

am back at work; will give keynote to the Louisiana State Psychological Association
in early November and next day meet with department heads and deans for three local Universities, Tulane, New Orleans, Louisiana State to see if some kind of 3-year deal can be worked out

then off to U Texas at Austin and Texas A&M, to which i have never been—biology is very strong in genetics and they may be interested—i will lecture to them on Recent Advances in Human Evolutionary Genetics, a specialty of mine

i attach latest version of Honour Killings—key is to look at are the PHOTOS—the women are almost without fail beautiful

—-

given that i was perhaps a little cruel or frenetic over Jim Watson i attach a short remembrance of his other side, Francis Crick, a much more broad-minded and friendly organism

i don't give one shit about race and IQ by the way—and i hope it is clear that VARIANCE in genetic traits of all varieties is expected to be especially high in Africa—hence it is the source of all successful hominid invasions—but i am saying nothing about AVERAGE difference in intelligence or anything else

—

i will shortly send you a piece onTrump as a narcissistic sociopath

—

finally here is a joke for you—we are both, i believe, politically—and not sexually—polymorphic perverse so there should be no problem with this character

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/blindfold-sex-men-trick-dating-app-ana-duarte-xavier-straight-a8571076.html

all best

p.s. please remember to tell me when to take my money out of the market !!

Chinese Influence & American Interests

PROMOTING CONSTRUCTIVE VIGILANCE

A PUBLICATION OF THE HOOVER INSTITUTION

Chinese Influence & American Interests

PROMOTING CONSTRUCTIVE VIGILANCE

Report of the Working Group on
Chinese Influence Activities in the United States

Co-Chairs

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The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the participants in the workshop and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers, or Board of Overseers of the Hoover Institution or the participant's affiliated institutions. The convening organizations of this project have no affiliation with the US government.

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This report has been a collaborative effort among a group of American scholars and policy practitioners who have spent long careers studying and engaging China, Asia more broadly, and a wide variety of political systems around the world. Each participant also has an abiding interest in protecting and strengthening democratic institutions in the United States and elsewhere in the world. While different participants took the lead in drafting particular sections of the report, each section was reviewed and contributed to by a number of participants in what became a truly collective and collaborative research effort. Our general findings and policy principles represent a broad—though not necessarily complete—consensus of the Working Group Participants.

This Working Group grew out of the Task Force on US-China Relations (chaired by Susan Shirk and Orville Schell), and we thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Henry Luce Foundation for their support of the Task Force. Although the two efforts share many members in common, they are separate and distinct endeavors.

We present this report as the collective product of discussions and research among a group of distinguished American specialists on China and US foreign affairs. It analyzes the growing challenge posed by China's influence-seeking activities in the United States across a number of important sectors of American public life. However, as we note throughout the report, these influence activities are not confined to the US. Indeed, they appear in different forms and to different degrees in a large number of other democratic societies around the world (in some cases more deeply than in the US). We therefore have opted to include in an Appendix short summary reports on China's influence activities (and the resulting national responses) in eight other countries.

We owe a particular debt of thanks to Kyle Hutzler, an MBA student at Stanford University with significant experience in China. His superior organizational skills and uncomplaining capacity for prodigious work contributed enormously to the coordination of our work throughout the project. We could not have produced this report without him.

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Policy Principles for Constructive Vigilance

The members of this Working Group seek a productive relationship between China and the United States. To this end, and in light of growing evidence of China's interference in various sectors of American government and society, we propose three broad principles that should serve as the basis for protecting the integrity of American institutions inside the United States while also protecting basic core American values, norms, and laws.

Transparency

Transparency is a fundamental tenet and asset of democracy, and the best protection against the manipulation of American entities by outside actors.

- American NGOs should play an important role in investigating and monitoring illicit activities by China and other foreign actors. They should as well seek to inform themselves about the full range of Chinese influence activities and the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate influence efforts.

- Congress should perform its constitutional role by continuing to investigate, report on, and recommend appropriate action concerning Chinese influence activities in the United States. It should update relevant laws and regulations regarding foreign influence, and adopt new ones, to strengthen transparency in foreign efforts to exert influence.

- Executive branch agencies should similarly investigate and publicize, when appropriate, findings concerning these activities, with a view to promoting healthy and responsible vigilance among American governmental and nongovernmental actors.

- The US media should undertake careful, fact-based investigative reporting of Chinese influence activities, and it should enhance its knowledge base for undertaking responsible reporting.

- Faculty governance is the key to preserving academic freedom in American universities. All gifts, grants, endowments, and cooperative programs, including

Confucius Institutes, should be subjected to the usual procedures of faculty oversight.

- US governmental and nongovernmental sectors should disclose financial and other relationships that may be subject to foreign influence.

Integrity

Foreign funding can undermine the independence of American institutions, and various types of coercive and covert activities by China (and other countries) directly contradict core democratic values and freedoms, which must be protected by institutional vigilance and effective governance.

- Openness and freedom are fundamental elements of American democracy and intrinsic strengths of the United States and its way of life. These values must be protected against corrosive actions by China and other countries.

- Various institutions—but notably universities and think tanks—need to enhance sharing and pooling of information concerning Chinese activities, and they should promote more closely coordinated collective action to counter China's inappropriate activities and pressures. This report recommends that American institutions within each of the above two sectors (and possibly others) formulate and agree to a "Code of Conduct" to guide their exchanges with Chinese counterparts.

- When they believe that efforts to exert influence have violated US laws or the rights of American citizens and foreign residents in the United States, US institutions should refer such activities to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

- Rigorous efforts should be undertaken to inform the Chinese American community about potentially inappropriate activities carried out by China. At the same time, utmost efforts must be taken to protect the rights of the Chinese American community, as well as protecting the rights of Chinese citizens living or studying in the United States.

- Consideration should be given to establishing a federal government office that American state and local governments and nongovernmental institutions could approach—on a strictly voluntary basis—for advice on how best to manage Chinese requests for engagement and partnership. This office could also provide confidential background on the affiliations of Chinese individuals and organizations to party and state institutions.

- All American institutions—governmental and nongovernmental—that deal with Chinese actors (and other potential sources of inappropriate foreign influence) should review their oversight and governance practices and codify and exemplify best standards of practice and due diligence.

Reciprocity

American institutions are deflected from their purpose of increasing US-China understanding, and become distorted as one-way channels of Chinese influence, when they are denied access to China on a basis that is reciprocal with the access Chinese institutions are granted here.

- The asymmetry of scholarly research access is the most glaring example of the lack of reciprocity. A whole variety of normal scholarly activities—including access to archives and certain libraries, fieldwork, conducting surveys, and interviewing officials or average citizens—have been cut off for American researchers in China while Chinese enjoy all of these academic opportunities in the United States. Individually and collectively, universities and other sectors of American democratic life should insist on greater reciprocity of access.

- US government public diplomacy activities are heavily circumscribed in China, while nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have encountered an increasingly difficult environment to carry out their work. More reasonable reciprocity for US public diplomacy efforts in China, relative to China's activities in the United States, should be addressed in negotiations between the two countries. In addition, this report recommends enhanced American efforts to promote independent news and information, and democratic ideas, through US global broadcasting and efforts to counter disinformation.

- The US government should actively promote and protect opportunities for American actors to operate in China.

Introduction

For three and a half decades following the end of the Maoist era, China adhered to Deng Xiaoping's policies of "reform and opening to the outside world" and "peaceful development." After Deng retired as paramount leader, these principles continued to guide China's international behavior in the leadership eras of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Admonishing Chinese to "keep your heads down and bide your time," these Party leaders sought to emphasize that China's rapid economic development and its accession to "great power" status need not be threatening to either the existing global order or the interests of its Asian neighbors. However, since Party general secretary Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the situation has changed. Under his leadership, China has significantly expanded the more assertive set of policies initiated by his predecessor Hu Jintao. These policies not only seek to redefine China's place in the world as a global player, but they also have put forward the notion of a "China option" (中国方案) that is claimed to be a more efficient developmental model than liberal democracy.

While Americans are well acquainted with China's quest for influence through the projection of diplomatic, economic, and military power, we are less aware of the myriad ways Beijing has more recently been seeking cultural and informational influence, some of which could undermine our democratic processes. These include efforts to penetrate and sway—through various methods that former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull summarized as "covert, coercive or corrupting"—a range of groups and institutions, including the Chinese American community, Chinese students in the United States, and American civil society organizations, academic institutions, think tanks, and media.[1]

Some of these efforts fall into the category of normal public diplomacy as pursued by many other countries. But others involve the use of coercive or corrupting methods to pressure individuals and groups and thereby interfere in the functioning of American civil and political life.

It is important not to exaggerate the threat of these new Chinese initiatives. China has not sought to interfere in a national election in the United States or to sow confusion or inflame polarization in our democratic discourse the way Russia has done. For all the tensions in the relationship, there are deep historical bonds of friendship, cultural exchange, and mutual inspiration between the two societies, which we celebrate and wish to nurture. And it is imperative that Chinese Americans—who feel the same pride in American citizenship as do other American ethnic communities—not be subjected to the kind of generalized suspicion or stigmatization that could lead to racial profiling or a new era of McCarthyism. However, with increased challenges in the diplomatic, economic, and security domains, China's influence activities have collectively helped throw the crucial relationship between the People's Republic of China and the United States into a worrisome state of imbalance and antagonism. (Throughout the report, "China" refers to the Chinese Communist Party and the government apparatus of the People's Republic of China, and not to Chinese society at large or the Chinese people as a whole.) Not only are the values of China's authoritarian system anathema to those held by most Americans, but there is also a growing body of evidence that the Chinese Communist Party views the American ideals of freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion, and association as direct challenges to its defense of its own form of one-party rule.[2]

Both the US and China have derived substantial benefit as the two nations have become more economically and socially intertwined. The value of combined US-China trade ($635.4 billion, with a $335.4 US deficit) far surpasses that between any other pair of countries.[3] More than 350,000 Chinese students currently study in US universities (plus 80,000 more in secondary schools). Moreover, millions of Chinese have immigrated to the United States seeking to build their lives with more economic, religious, and political freedom, and their presence has been an enormous asset to American life.

However, these virtues cannot eclipse the reality that in certain key ways China is exploiting America's openness in order to advance its aims on a competitive playing field that is hardly level. For at the same time that China's authoritarian system takes advantage of the openness of American society to seek influence, it impedes legitimate efforts by American counterpart institutions to engage Chinese society on a reciprocal basis. This disparity lies at the heart of this project's concerns.

China's influence activities have moved beyond their traditional United Front focus on diaspora communities to target a far broader range of sectors in Western societies, ranging from think tanks, universities, and media to state, local, and national government institutions. China seeks to promote views sympathetic to the Chinese Government, policies, society, and culture; suppress alternative views; and co-opt key American players to support China's foreign policy goals and economic interests.

Normal public diplomacy, such as visitor programs, cultural and educational exchanges, paid media inserts, and government lobbying are accepted methods used by many governments to project soft power. They are legitimate in large measure because they are transparent. But this report details a range of more assertive and opaque "sharp power" activities that China has stepped up within the United States in an increasingly active manner.[4] These exploit the openness of our democratic society to challenge, and sometimes even undermine, core American freedoms, norms, and laws.

Except for Russia, no other country's efforts to influence American politics and society is as extensive and well-funded as China's. The ambition of Chinese activity in terms of the breadth, depth of investment of financial resources, and intensity requires far greater scrutiny than it has been getting, because China is intervening more resourcefully and forcefully across a wider range of sectors than Russia. By undertaking activities that have become more organically embedded in the pluralistic fabric of American life, it has gained a far wider and potentially longer-term impact.

Summary of Findings

This report, written and endorsed by a group of this country's leading China specialists and students of one-party systems is the result of more than a year of research and represents an attempt to document the extent of China's expanding influence operations inside the United States. While there have been many excellent reports documenting specific examples of Chinese influence seeking,[5] this effort attempts to come to grips with the issue as a whole and features an overview of the Chinese party-state United Front apparatus responsible for guiding overseas influence activities. It also includes individual sections on different sectors of American society that have been targeted by China. The appendices survey China's quite diverse influence activities in other democratic countries around the world.

Among the report's findings:

- The **Chinese Communist party-state** leverages a broad range of party, state, and non-state actors to advance its influence-seeking objectives, and in recent years it has significantly accelerated both its investment and the intensity of these efforts. While many of the activities described in this report are state-directed, there is no single institution in China's party-state that is wholly responsible, even though the "United Front Work Department" has become a synecdoche for China's influence activities, and the State Council Information Office and CCP[6] Central Committee Foreign Affairs Commission have oversight responsibilities (see Appendix: "China's Influence Operations Bureaucracy"). Because of the pervasiveness of the party-state, many nominally independent actors—including Chinese civil society, academia, corporations, and even religious institutions—are also ultimately beholden to the government and are frequently pressured into service to advance state interests. The main agencies responsible for foreign influence operations include the Party's United Front Work Department, the Central Propaganda Department, the International Liaison Department, the State Council Information Office, the All-China Federation of Overseas Chinese, and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. These organizations and others are bolstered by various state agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, which in March 2018 was merged into the United Front Work Department, reflecting that department's increasing power.

- In **American federal and state politics**, China seeks to identify and cultivate rising politicians. Like many other countries, Chinese entities employ prominent lobbying and public relations firms and cooperate with influential civil society groups. These activities complement China's long-standing support of visits to China by members of Congress and their staffs. In some rare instances China has used private citizens and/or companies to exploit loopholes in US regulations that prohibit direct foreign contributions to elections.

- On **university campuses**, Confucius Institutes (CIs) provide the Chinese government access to US student bodies. Because CIs have had positive value in exposing students and communities to Chinese language and culture, the report does not generally oppose them. But it does recommend that more rigorous university oversight and standards of academic freedom and transparency be exercised over CIs. With the direct support of the Chinese embassy and consulates, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) sometimes report on and compromise the academic freedom of other Chinese students and American faculty on American campuses. American universities that host events deemed politically offensive by the Chinese Communist Party and government have been subject to increasing pressure, and sometimes even to retaliation, by diplomats in the Chinese embassy and its six consulates as well as by CSSA branches. Although the United States is open to Chinese scholars studying American politics or history, China restricts access to American scholars and researchers seeking to study politically sensitive areas of China's political system, society, and history in country.

- At **think tanks**, researchers, scholars, and other staffers report regular attempts by Chinese diplomats and other intermediaries to influence their activities within the United States. At the same time that China has begun to establish its own network of think tanks in the United States, it has been constraining the number and scale of American think tanks operations in China. It also restricts the access to China and to Chinese officials of American think-tank researchers and delegations.

- In **business**, China often uses its companies to advance strategic objectives abroad, gaining political influence and access to critical infrastructure and technology. China has made foreign companies' continued access to its domestic market conditional on their compliance with Beijing's stance on Taiwan and Tibet. This report documents how China has supported the formation of dozens of local Chinese chambers of commerce in the United States that appear to have ties to the Chinese government.

- In the American **media**, China has all but eliminated the plethora of independent Chinese-language media outlets that once served Chinese American communities. It has co-opted existing Chinese-language outlets and established its own new outlets. State-owned Chinese media companies have also established a significant foothold in the English-language market, in print, radio, television, and online. At the same time, the Chinese government has severely limited the ability of US and other Western media outlets to conduct normal news gathering activities within China, much less to provide news feeds directly to Chinese listeners, viewers, and readers in China, by limiting and blocking their Chinese-language websites and forbidding distribution of their output within China itself.

- Among the **Chinese American community**, China has long sought to influence—even silence—voices critical of the PRC or supportive of Taiwan by dispatching personnel to the United States to pressure these individuals and while also pressuring their relatives in China. Beijing also views Chinese Americans as members of a worldwide Chinese diaspora that presumes them to retain not only an interest in the welfare of China but also a loosely defined cultural, and even political, allegiance to the so-called Motherland. Such activities not only interfere with freedom of speech within the United States but they also risk generating suspicion of Chinese Americans even though those who accept Beijing's directives are a very small minority.

- In the **technology sector**, China is engaged in a multifaceted effort to misappropriate technologies it deems critical to its economic and military success. Beyond economic espionage, theft, and the forced technology transfers that are required of many joint venture partnerships, China also captures much valuable new technology through its investments in US high-tech companies and through its exploitation of the openness of American university labs. This goes well beyond influence-seeking to a deeper and more disabling form of penetration. The economic and strategic losses for the United States are increasingly unsustainable, threatening not only to help China gain global dominance of a number of the leading technologies of the future, but also to undermine America's commercial and military advantages.

- Around **the world**, China's influence-seeking activities in the United States are mirrored in different forms in many other countries. To give readers a sense of the variation in China's influence-seeking efforts abroad, this report also includes summaries of the experiences of eight other countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK.

Toward Constructive Vigilance

In weighing policy responses to influence seeking in a wide variety of American institutions, the Working Group has sought to strike a balance between passivity and overreaction, confidence in our foundations and alarm about their possible subversion, and the imperative to sustain openness while addressing the unfairness of contending on a series of uneven playing fields. Achieving this balance requires that we differentiate constructive from harmful forms of interaction and carefully gauge the challenge, lest we see threats everywhere and overreact in ways that both undermine our own principles and unnecessarily damage the US-China relationship.

The sections that follow lodge recommendations under three broad headings. The first two, promoting “transparency” and “integrity,” are hardly controversial in the face of the existing challenge, and they elicited little debate. Sunshine is the best disinfectant against any manipulation of American entities by outside actors and we should shine as much light as possible on Chinese influence seeking over organizations and individuals if it is covert, coercive, or corrupting. We should also shore up the vitality of our institutions and our own solidarity against Chinese divide-and-conquer tactics. Defending the integrity of American democratic institutions requires standing up for our principles of openness and freedom, more closely coordinating responses within institutional sectors, and also better informing both governmental and nongovernmental actors about the potentially harmful influence activities of China and other foreign actors.

It was in the third category, promoting “reciprocity,” where the Working Group confronted the most difficult choices. In a wide range of fields, the Chinese government severely restricts American platforms and access while Chinese counterparts are given free rein in our society. Can this playing field be leveled and greater reciprocity be attained without lowering our own standards of openness and fairness? Since complaints and demarches by the US government and private institutions have not produced adequate results, is it possible to get Chinese attention by imposing reciprocal restrictions that do not undermine our own principles of openness?

The Working Group, not always in unanimity, settled on a selective approach. We believe that in certain areas the only practical leverage resides in tit-for-tat retaliation. This would not be an end in itself, but a means to compel a greater reciprocity. The Chinese government respects firmness, fairness summons it, and American opinion compels it.

Each section of this report offers its own recommendations for responding to China’s influence seeking activities in ways that will enhance the transparency of relationships, defend the integrity of American democratic institutions, and grant American individuals and institutions greater access in China that equates with the degree of access afforded Chinese counterparts in the United States.

Our recommendations urge responses to China’s challenge that will promote greater transparency, integrity, and reciprocity. We believe that a new emphasis on such “constructive vigilance” is the best way to begin to protect our democratic traditions, institutions, and nation, and to create a fairer and more reciprocal relationship that will be the best guarantor of healthier ties between the United States and China.

NOTES

1 Malcolm Turnbull, “Speech Introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017,” December 7, 2017, https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an.

2 See CCP Central Committee Document No. 9: http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation.

3 https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china.

4 National Endowment for Democracy, Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence, Washington, DC, December 2017, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Full-Report.pdf.

5 Several other studies have recently been published concerning China’s influence activities and united front work abroad, including: Bowe, Alexander. “China’s Overseas United Front Work.” US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. August 24, 2018. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%27s%20Overseas%20United%20Front%20Work%20-%20Background%20and%20 Implications%20 for%20US_final_0.pdf; Jonas Parello-Plesner, The Chinese Communist Party’s Foreign Interference Operations: How the US and Other Democracies Should Respond: Hudson Institute, June 2018, https://www.hudson.org/research/14409-the-chinese-communist-party-s-foreign-interference-operations-how-the-u-s-and-other-democracies-should-respond; Anastasya Lloyd- Damnjanovic, A Preliminary Study of PRC Political Influence and Interference Activities in American Higher Education, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, September 6, 2018, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/preliminary-study-prc-political-influence-and-interference-activities-american-higher.

6 Throughout this report, we use the term “CCP,” which stands for Chinese Communist Party. It is sometimes also referred to as the Communist Party of China (CPC).

SECTION 1

Congress

During past presidential administrations, the US Congress has generally served as a brake on executive initiatives to "engage" China at the expense of other US interests that members have historically valued, such as maintaining good relations with Taiwan, interacting with the Tibetan government in exile, and expressing support for human rights. When President Donald Trump assumed office in 2017 and actively began courting Chinese President Xi Jinping, first at Mar-a-Lago and then at the Beijing summit, Congress took a wait-and-see posture. But as his own ardor for a partnership with Xi cooled and his administration became disenchanted with the idea of finding an easy new "engagement" policy, momentum began to shift. Soon Congress was working toward one of the most significant reevaluations of American-China policy since the start of normalization fifty years ago. And with the White House increasingly skeptical about the prospects of winning President Xi 's cooperation, a series of new initiatives began issuing forth from both the administration and the Congress, suggesting a rapidly changing landscape for US-China relations. What was telling was that this tidal shift now emanated not from Congress alone—where it had strong bipartisan support—but from the White House and National Security Council, the Pentagon, the Office of the US Trade Representative, the Department of the Treasury, and even the Department of State. As sentiment shifted away from hopes of finding common ways to collaborate, a spate of new US policy initiatives began appearing that suggested a sea change. Congress passed the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, which sought to bolster US defenses against both Chinese military threats and China's influence-seeking operations inside the United States. Congress also passed the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act of 2018 (FIRMMA), which empowered CFIUS (the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States) to expand its oversight of foreign direct investment (FDI) from China. At the same time, members of Congress also began expressing ever more strenuous opposition to Chinese nonreciprocal practices in trade and investment, such as: putting whole sectors of the Chinese economy out-of-bounds to American investors; using Chinese companies to buy into sensitive high-tech areas of the US economy through mergers and acquisitions; and making the transfer of American advanced technology to Chinese partners the price of American companies being given access to Chinese markets. Congressional concern rose over Beijing's continued expansion into and militarization of the South China Sea; the predatory lending practices that can be involved in President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative; and Beijing's continued persecution of Taiwan and opposition to US support for the island.

This section reviews highlights of Chinese government's efforts to influence the US Congress since the start of the normalization process in 1972. As suggested above, because it has viewed such "engagement" as too often taking place at the expense of more important interests, the Congress has usually been more wary than the White House of allowing hopes for a more positive US-China relations to determine our policy. At times, such as during the passage of the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979 and in reaction to the Chinese crackdown around Tiananmen Square in 1989, Congress has actively resisted the White House and sought to turn American policy in directions both the Chinese leadership and the US administration have opposed. However, often Congress has played a somewhat passive role, especially in recent years. Still, the control it formally exercises over US government budget outlays, legislation, and the approval of appointments of senior administration officials makes Congress not only important in the formation of US-China policy but also a prime target for Chinese influence efforts.

By providing historical background, the review that follows informs contemporary US concerns about Chinese government efforts to influence American leaders and public opinion. The record over the past four decades shows some success in Chinese efforts to win influence over congressional opinion. However, more often than not, whatever positive results they have won have not lasted in the face of enduring differences between the two countries.

Congressional Visits to China, 1972–1977

President Nixon's second term featured the Watergate scandal, which forced his resignation in 1974 and resulted in a lull in high-level communication with China. This circumstance gave more prominence to the reports issued by the approximately eighty members of Congress who traveled to China in the period between President Nixon's visit in 1972 and the start of the Carter administration in January 1977. The visits of these congressional delegations—including (repeatedly) top leaders from both parties—were by far the most active channel of high-level communications between the United States and the PRC during this time. And most of the members who went to China wrote reports that were published as official documents. At the time, these congressional reports, as well as the media's coverage of their visits, became important vehicles through which American congressional leaders voiced their views and opinions on domestic Chinese politics and on Sino-American relations, both of which were having an increasingly important impact on American interests in Asia and the world.

By and large, these American visitors were pleased by the post-1972 developments in US-China relations, seeing them as likely to be both a source of strategic leverage against the Soviet Union and a stabilizing influence in Asian affairs. The government in Beijing was seen as preoccupied with domestic affairs, no longer opposed to the presence of American forces in East Asia, and anxious to work with the United States and other noncommunist countries to offset Soviet pressure against China. The Americans saw the Taiwan question as the main impediment to improved bilateral relations, but they differed on how the United States should deal with the problem. Although most members of Congress accepted the Ford administration's cautious approach to China as wise, many were circumspect about the merits of China's political, economic, social, and value systems, then experiencing the last turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and the decline and death of Mao Zedong in 1976.

These congressional visits to China seemed to help the Chinese government improve its standing with Congress and favorably influence American public opinion. The resulting reports show how granting these delegations access to China's leaders and elements of Chinese society that Beijing wished to highlight proved an effective strategy of calming tensions. And the costs for Beijing were limited to modest in-country expenses, since the members usually traveled as official congressional delegations on US government aircraft.

One notable feature of this historical episode was the remarkable role played by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT). Senator Mansfield was widely consulted in Washington as an Asian affairs expert, meaning his observations arguably had more influence than those of other members. He visited China three times during this period, publishing separate reports with detailed assessments of various issues of concern to Americans at the time. In the main, his reports conveyed information and opinions that conformed with Chinese interests. Unlike many other members favoring a more cautious pace of normalization with China and sustained ties with Taiwan, Senator Mansfield urged the United States to promptly end ties with Taiwan and accept Beijing's conditions for normal diplomatic relations, warning that to do otherwise would lead to dangerous friction in Sino-American relations and instability in Asia. Senator Mansfield portrayed China as a power with fundamentally peaceful motives in international affairs and placed much of the blame on the United States for past Sino-American conflicts in Asia. He also contradicted those members who worried that China's leadership change could lead to internal struggles affecting China's international and domestic policies. He insisted that such skepticism was unwarranted, because what he called the Maoist system had been effectively inculcated among the Chinese people. Some members complained that the limited itinerary for congressional visits that was furnished by Chinese hosts did not provide a basis for any meaningful assessment of conditions there. Despite the fact that many congressional visitors questioned how durable China's Maoist regime was and how lasting China's cooperation with the United States would actually prove to be, Mansfield countered that he had had enough opportunity during his three visits to the PRC to move about and obtain enough information through on-the-spot observation and talks with PRC leaders to conclude that it was no passing phenomenon. So, while many members thought the PRC's system of indoctrination and control to be repressive politically, economically, and socially—an affront to the human rights and dignity of its people—voices like Mansfield's served to mute the criticism, maintaining that the country's political, economic, and social system was uniquely well suited to the Chinese people.

Influence Efforts after Establishing Official Relations, 1979–1988

As the Carter administration began moving toward full diplomatic recognition of the PRC, it withheld many of the details about its plans from Congress. One of the largest unresolved issues was the fate of Taiwan, in which Congress took a special interest. The United States had already dropped recognition of Taiwan at the United Nations, and now many in Congress worried that the United States would move to completely abandon the island. In response, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979, which underlined the importance of the United States keeping an ongoing relationship with Taiwan and continuing to provide weapons for its defense.

After formal diplomatic relations were reestablished, China responded in the 1980s by expanding the size and capacity of its Washington embassy staff dedicated to dealing with Congress. Chinese officials lobbying Congress viewed with dismay the rise of pro-Taiwan independence groups among Taiwanese Americans, such as the Formosan Association for Public Affairs, which demonstrated an ability to promote their agenda despite the fact that the United States had broken ties with Taiwan. Beijing would go on to borrow a page from the Nationalist government's playbook by beefing up a diplomatic arm capable of building closer relations with important congressional members and staffers.[1] Since then, the Chinese government has welcomed numerous US delegations composed of both congressional members and staffers. The main host in China for such delegations has been the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA).[2] Founded in December 1949, this organization focuses on international issues and foreign policy research and on conducting international exchanges of officials and expanding people-to-people diplomatic activities. This institute also works to establish contacts with foreign political activists, diplomats, and other distinguished individuals while organizing public lectures and symposiums on academic subjects and international policy affairs.

CPIFA is a so-called united front organization, similar to those found in the former Soviet Union and other Leninist states that seek to opportunistically build alliances wherever they can. Such organizations, or GONGOs ("government-organized non-governmental organizations"), carry out government-directed policies and cooperative initiatives with influential foreigners without being perceived as a formal part of the Chinese government. CPIFA's experience in dealing with foreign visitors is broad. Between 1972 and 2002, it hosted more than four thousand leading Americans in China. Being well connected with the Chinese government's State Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is positioned to organize meetings with high-level officials when the Party deems it in its interest to do so. The funding arrangements for congressional staff delegations visiting China usually provide for their travel to be paid by the US side, so as to avoid falling victim to ethics committees and overseers or violating rules regarding conflicts of interest and foreign lobbying. CPIFA often assumed in-country expenses.

The staff delegation trips to China were welcomed and sought after by congressional staff and congressional support agency personnel, mainly from the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress, which had a growing interest in China and the issues it posed for US policy. The trips generally came twice per year and involved meetings with Chinese government officials and others responsible for key foreign affairs and domestic issues of interest to the Congress. The exchanges in these meetings were generally cordial and substantive, although the trips also included sightseeing and visits to parts of China of interest to the Congress.

In the United States, there have been a number of counterpart groups that have facilitated congressional exchanges. Among them are the Washington, DC-based US-Asia Institute (USAI), which has played a leading role in managing the congressional staff delegations side since 1985.[3] The National Committee on US-China Relations did a pilot congressional staff delegation visit to China in 1976 and resumed involvement with such exchanges again during the past decade.[4] In the 1980s, the Asia-Pacific Exchange Foundation (also known as the Far East Studies Institute) also managed a number of congressional staff delegations to China, while the US-Asia Institute has, since 1985, coordinated over 120 such delegations and exchanges to China. These visits have been done in cooperation with the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA) and the Better Hong Kong Foundation (BHKF). But the National People's Congress (NPC) has perhaps hosted the most trips, taking over a thousand congressional staff members to China. In these trips, members have traveled to nearly every corner of China, including Xinjiang and Tibet. In their discussions, they have covered a wide range of themes important to the US-China relationship. Staffers participating in such trips have clearly advanced their understanding of Chinese developments.

Congress and Turmoil in US-China Relations, 1989–2001

The number of the congressional staff delegations to China slowed following the collapse of congressional support for engagement with China after the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. Congressional anger and the impulse to punish the Chinese government overrode past interest in constructive engagement. As a result, Beijing began relying more heavily on the US business community and its organizations, notably the Emergency Committee for American Trade, to persuade Congress not to end the most-favored nation tariff treatment for Chinese imports. The Chinese embassy and various lobbyists who were, or at least claimed to be, supported by the Chinese government also tried to limit the damage by seeking to convince congressional members that conditions in China were much better there than were depicted in American media at the time.[5]

Based on the reputation of its past efforts, the US-Asia Institute, presumably with the encouragement of its Chinese counterparts, strove to resume the staff dialogues and attracted a wide range of senior staff and support personnel, including some of those working for the harshest congressional critics of China's crackdown. One trip in December 1989 featured very heated debates with Chinese officials, especially after it was announced that National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger were also in Beijing for talks with Chinese leaders and that the two had made an earlier secret trip in July, soon after the crackdown. As the Bush administration had publicly promised Congress that all such contacts would end, the staff delegates' anger at and criticism of China's repression was compounded by their harsh reaction to the Bush administration's actions.

As US-China relations continued during a tumultuous post-Tiananmen crackdown period, Congress played important roles on such key issues as the debate over most-favored nation tariff treatment, the visit of Taiwan's president to the United States in 1995, and the decision to approve China's entry into the World Trade Organization. The Chinese government endeavored to build influence with and gain access to Congress by encouraging US businesses to lobby Congress on China's behalf and by continuing to receive member and staff delegations in China.

Other entities in the Chinese official structure, including the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese military, at times attempted to gain access to Congress. The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party engaged in growing exchanges with the major American political parties on a party-to-party basis. A Chinese "united front" organization, the Chinese Association for International Understanding (CAIFU), managed some of these ensuing trips. Also involved was the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC). This "united front" organization's link to the Chinese government was not then well known, though in recent years it has been publicly linked to the People's Liberation Army's Political Warfare Department, which has intelligence responsibilities.[6] Meanwhile, other exchanges with US congressional specialists on China were promoted by a mysterious "united front" operative with excellent official contacts in China named Jimmy Wong. In this troubled decade, Wong made himself known to a wide range of Americans playing a role in China policy as having the ability to set up visits to China and meetings with key officials very quickly. He occasionally even opened his spacious Beijing home to congressional staffers. His precise affiliation with the Chinese authorities remains obscure.[7]

The approaches of the Chinese government to gain influence and gather information abroad differ from the tradecraft of Russia and the former Soviet Union.[8] Notably, the Chinese focus more on individuals rather than effects, and on shaping the personal context rather than operational tricks. It is person-to-person relationships that carry the weight of Chinese information operations. Working on these personal ties, the Chinese authorities focus on facilitating meetings and contacts that may or may not result in opportunities to influence foreign targets. Still, because Chinese influence seeking is largely a governmental undertaking, it is hardly surprising that the Chinese mix influence operations with espionage. In one instance, after a visit to China supported by CAIFC, an American congressional official was asked by two employees at CAIFC who facilitated his trip to host them during a return visit to Washington. He obliged, and they were seemingly satisfied, having shopped extensively during their stay. Subsequently, the Chinese embassy officers who had arranged the congressional official's visit to China with CAIFC were arrested and expelled for trying to steal US weapons technology, causing the US official to end all contact with CAIFC.

Current Era

Tensions in US-China relations subsided after the terrorist attack on America in September 2001 and subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq preoccupied the Bush administration and Congress. Chinese and American leaders also proved to be sufficiently pragmatic to reach common ground on advancing relations in mutually agreeable ways and managing differences through a wide range of dialogues. Such exchanges only catalyzed visits by more congressional members and staff delegations visits to China. At this time, members often traveled to China in US government–funded trips as guests of the US embassy. Some member trips and very frequent staff delegation visits were authorized under provisions of the Mutual Education and Cultural Exchange Act (MECEA) that were in line with the guidance of congressional ethics committees.[9] In addition to the work of the US-Asia Institute, those organizing and facilitating staff delegations grew to include the Aspen Institute, the National Committee on US-China Relations, and the US-China Policy Foundation.[10]

China also increased its own capacity to engage Congress beyond trips. Having moved into a new embassy in Washington in 2009, the Chinese embassy increased its congressional affairs staff to twelve (as of 2011), while also retaining the lobbying services of the firm Patton Boggs.[11] During his time as ambassador, Zhou Wenzhong boasted that he had visited some one hundred members of Congress in their home districts. When certain measures, such as a bill that would have penalized China for being a "currency manipulator," came before Congress, the embassy's in-house team's efforts reflected what some US officials called a much more "nuanced" and "sophisticated" understanding of the body. Whether or not Chinese officials or lobbyists interacting with congressional offices endeavored to exert influence by means beyond persuasion—such as by offering material benefits or threatening to withdraw Chinese investments or other tangible benefits to the congressional district—remained hard to discern given the very limited public reporting on such matters.[12]

Congress, for its part, had already formalized efforts to better understand China through a variety of working groups. By 2006, both the House and the Senate had formed a US-China Inter-Parliamentary Exchange Group, which conducted periodic exchanges with China's National People's Congress. Also showing stronger American interest in China at that time were the Congressional China Caucus (led by members tending to be critical of China); the China Working Group (led by members supportive of closer engagement with China); and the Senate China Working Group (led by members supportive of closer relations). Earlier legislation had established the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, focused on human rights conditions in China (a perennial negative aspect in US-China relations), and the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, which was known for its annual report listing a variety of developments in China seen as adverse to US interests and values. While the latter two commissions continue to be active, are robust, and have growing impact, many of the other exchange mechanisms have proven less than durable. Once the leading members who founded such groups leave Congress, interest usually wanes. The National People's Congress became even more active in supporting the growing number of congressional staff delegations to China during this period. In 2018, the House China Working Group remained active, but the House Congressional China Caucus and the Senate China Working Group were inactive.

Most recently, the 115th Congress has actively embraced the Trump administration's view that China has benefited more from the bilateral relationship than has the United States. In fact, amidst all the partisan warfare currently dividing Republicans and Democrats in Washington, a skepticism about China's intentions and reliability and a willingness to push back in a bipartisan manner against its un-reciprocal, and sometimes even predatory, policies, is one of the most surprising phenomena. In 2018, for example, the Congress unanimously passed the Taiwan Travel Act, which encourages the Trump administration to host more high-ranking officials from Taiwan, a move that angered Beijing. Still, Congress is hardly united, even on trade. Some members have objected to the adverse impacts punitive tariffs are having on their constituencies, or they have opposed imposing tariffs on allies at the same time tariffs are imposed on China. And some members criticized President Trump's decision in May 2018 to ease harsh sanctions against the prominent Chinese high-technology firm ZTE, in response to a personal plea from the Chinese president. Nevertheless, President Trump's dominance in the Republican Party means that few in the Republican ranks controlling Congress are inclined to oppose him, especially on China. Indeed, Congress is generally endorsing the most significant reevaluation of American-China policy since the start of normalization fifty years ago. As such, it can be said that Chinese influence on Capitol Hill has reached a low point.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Congress is in the midst of a major reevaluation of the very assumptions underlying the decades-old American policy of "engagement" with China. Because of this increasingly competitive, even adversarial, new climate, Chinese influence and information operations are widely coming to be seen as expressions of a political system whose values are antithetical to those of the United States and as a threat to the integrity of Congress and our democracy. Arguing, as many have done as far back as Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, that Congress should move forward with positive engagement with China while seeking to pragmatically manage our differences now seems, in the current environment, both naïve and quixotic.

Promote Transparency

Follow-on congressional oversight will go far toward educating the Congress, the media, and the public about these important topics. The issues are complicated and have no simple solutions. Various specialists within and outside the US government should be consulted in determining the full scope of the problem and what should be done.

Promote Integrity

Congress needs also to distinguish between issues that present a real threat to the United States, such as Chinese espionage and Chinese-directed monitoring of Chinese students on US campuses, and institutions such as Confucius Institutes, which, as we have noted elsewhere in this report, can be better regulated by universities themselves.

Promote Reciprocity

In coming up with remedial steps, Congress must consider the broader bilateral relationship. It is asked to weigh carefully the continued important positive elements in the US-China relationship, the negative consequences that might arise from a confrontational approach to China, and America's need to protect and foster its strengths and interests.

NOTES

1 Sources for the information and judgments in this section include: United States Congress. House Committee on Foreign Affairs. *Executive-Legislative Consultations over China Policy, 1978–1979.* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1980; Ramon Myers, Michel Oksenberg, and David Shambaugh (eds.), *Making China Policy: Lessons from the Bush and Clinton Administrations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The US and China Since 1972* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992); David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing US-China Relations, 1989–2000* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001); James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Robert Sutter, *US-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); Nancy B. Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

2 See website at http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/38189.htm.

3 See the institute's website at https://www.usasiainstitute.org/delegations/chin.

4 See the committee's website at https://www.ncuscr.org/content/congressional-committee-staff-delegation-china-1976.

5 Sources for this section rely on sources seen in source note 2 and Shambaugh, David, ed., *Tangled Titans,* Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013; Sutter, Robert, *US-China Relations: Perilous Past, Uncertain Present,* Boulder CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 119–164.